Upstage

JOHN MASON
BROWN

pleasure have I, of
books to have great plenty.
for this is my mind, this one
THE SHIP of FOOLS 1570
SCHUBERT

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JOHN MASON BROWN

UPSTAGE

By John Mason Brown

THE MODERN THEATRE IN REVOLT

[1929]

UPSTAGE

The American Theatre in Performance

[1930]

Upstage

THE AMERICAN THEATRE IN PERFORMANCE

BY

JOHN MASON BROWN

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TO

MARY MASON BROWN WAITE

PREFACE

Before the Curtain

THIS is not a book of back-stage personality sketches. If it resists the tempting items they inevitably include, it is because they belong by rights to the entirely different province of the interviewer, the intimate biographer and the zealous press-agent. And the first gesture that is, as a rule, native to these worthy people is the last the present volume hopes to make. For where the stage-door Boswell begins by inviting playgoers to draw up their chairs in the dressing-room of a noted actress or sit by the fire of a distinguished playwright, the chapters that follow only ask them to remain seated in the theatre.

The reason is a simple one. This is a book that is exclusively devoted to the theatre in performance and that deals with the people of the theatre only in relation to their professional contributions. Though they may regret it, their off-stage life is left to them, but their various performances are as avidly scanned here as they would be in an actual playhouse. The particular theatre which is the subject of the book is that helter-skelter, often despairing, but nevertheless vigorously exciting theatre of contemporary America, in which the men and women who are discussed in the following pages, and the ideas they represent, play important

if not pivotal parts. Because it is the deeds of the doers that are always responsible for the æsthetic principles of the recorders who come after them, it has seemed both natural and inevitable that a book which aims at reflecting some of the outstanding characteristics of the American theatre and recording a few of its major problems and tendencies should be written around the people whose work may be taken as most typical of its dominant ideas. Accordingly the men and women selected for discussion in these pages are not only treated as individuals, important in and by themselves, but also as illustrations of the practise of the current theatre at its best or most representative. In short, the attempt has been to appraise the so-called "æsthetic" of the American theatre (though that is a cumbersome, high-flown, and hideous word) in terms of the actual practitioners who have created it or are amplifying it.

In order to appraise the work of even a few of those people who are leaders in the various fields of American theatrical activity, and to sketch in the general background or condition of their crafts before turning to specific instances, it has been imperative to select carefully, even unfairly, from the vast material available. For one thing it has been necessary to limit the book to what is preciously identified as the "legitimate theatre." With the field thus narrowed, however, the selection still involves what will rightly appear to some readers as the committing of unpardonable omissions. My only hope is that, unpardonable as the omissions may be, they will at least seem justifiable when judged from the viewpoint of what the book sets out to do. I know only too well what a stout volume could be written, and several have been, around the American dramatist alone. I also realize that an equally thick book would be needed to record with any adequate fairness the efforts of the manager-producers, or the directors of the American stage; that a volume of the same size would be required to evaluate the

contributions the so-called "Art Theatres" have made within the last fifteen years or so; and that any extended discussion of the part our numerous scenic artists have played would demand an almost equal space. A tome of respectable dimensions might even be spun on the writings of those gentlemen of the press who sit in judgment on our theatre if a publisher could be persuaded that anyone, except the critics included, would purchase it. I am fully aware, too, that a generous six-foot shelf rather than any single book would be needed to do any kind of justice to the actors and actresses who, whether they come from actor-families or not, can claim a legitimate importance because of their names, the variety of their types of work, or the industry of their press-agents. I firmly believe, however, if each of these separate volumes, devoted to a special phase of the theatre's wide activities, succeeded in doing what it set out to do, it would still fail in recapturing that composite sense of endeavor we recognize as "theatre." For the theatre, as only the most obdurate of reactionaries are now-a-days unwilling to admit, is not what any of these men and women may contribute to it in their independent capacities. Instead it is a strange, ineffable blending of each of their various efforts, a mysterious process by which diversity somehow manages to emerge as unity.

By that I do not mean the theatre of the individual actor, of the designer's exhibition room, the playwright's printed script, or even what Carlyle once identified as "the whole tragic, comic, heroic theatre visible performing under one hat." But I do mean the theatre of the playhouses, where audiences assemble to watch a joint unfolding by those many forces which work together to evoke that consolidated result implied by the word "production." In seeking to present something of that quality, rather than to make a full record, a text-book, or a history, I have ranged at will among the various arts and artists which, to my mind, best

reflect the temper of the contemporary American theatre.

The book deals in turn with the men and women who are factors in a production — the playwright, the actor, the designer and the director. It goes a step beyond the first night, however, for it also includes a chapter on dramatic criticism and some of the men who have practised it in America; and the architect who, more than most people will acknowledge, conditions the work of the theatre and is responsible for its basic conventions. In the case of each of the theatre's subdivisions, I have aimed at writing a prefatory chapter (sometimes it is an independent chapter that has no sequel) on the general theory of each of the separate departments, or an analysis of their present tendencies or a presentation of certain problems which now confront their special workers, before proceeding to specific instances.

But enough of my difficulties. From now on they are not mine.

Were this the French instead of the American theatre I am certain that three knocks at least would have been heard already — even if there happened to be no other and more valid reason than that it is long past curtain time.

JOHN MASON BROWN

New York City

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Upstage

1

The Playwright and the American Theatre

UNTIL very recent years, in fact until after the turn of the last century, the playwright was in many ways the last colonial left in the United States. He and his father and his father's father may have lived in New England, Ohio, or California for the full span of their natural or dramatic lives. As a native son he may have had the fullest admiration for Betsy Ross and her exploits in bunting. He may have quickened to all the tall tales of heroism that attended the winning of the West. He may have been the most nasal of Yankees, the most dignified of Philadelphians, the proudest of Southerners, or the most gold-digging of Californians. But when he decided to write a play he forgot all about his oath of allegiance, his bed-time stories, and his upbringing and turned, willy-nilly, into a home-sick colonial even before his pen had been dipped into his inkstand. He was no longer a Yankee, a Southerner, a Californian, or a native son, but merely a playwright, looking longingly, anxiously, fondly towards the old country, wondering what was being done at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and wondering, too, what England had appropriated from the

theatres of France and Germany. If London put the stamp of her approval on it, then it was something far too important for him to miss.

Though many years had passed since some gunpowder in Concord had roared its way around an echoing world, and even more time had elapsed since the Hallams had first brought their company to a New York of which the name meant something very British instead of something very American, the American playwright of the '80's and '90's was in most ways as subservient to the tastes and modes of London Town as the pioneering Hallams had been.

Of course, he had not left American material alone. Shortly after the Revolution, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* had appeared, in which Jonathan — a good American comico, grandfather of Simon Switchell and forerunner of many rubes and rustics yet unborn — had made his appearance. But even Royall Tyler, as Montrose J. Moses has pointed out, did not create his Jonathan until he had read *The School for Scandal* with a studious eye. Through the ensuing years, though he was constantly bringing native types upon his stage, the American playwright was still looking back towards Europe for inspiration and courage, and holding the mirror up to London even more than to nature. So, too, of course, was the theatre of which he was a part, with its dominant English acting tradition, and its endless importations from the Old World. But as time moved forward and the Nineteenth Century took the place of the Eighteenth and began to progress in its own rights, the English stage towards which he — and his manager — still cast rather wistful backward glances ceased to be the theatre of Sheridan. Instead it became the theatre of Sheridan Knowles, and a host of minor playwrights who had lost the great Sheridan's genius for comedy, and put in its place exag-

gerated melodramas, spun in the turgid pentameters of mediocre blank verse. When the Sheridan Knowleses and the Bulwer-Lyttons had faded from sight, new fashions came into being. The Boucicaults, the Reades, and the Tom Robertsons appeared and finally (due to that whiskered giant of the north — Ibsen — and those lesser giants of the French stage — Augier, Dumas-fils, and Sardou) came Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero.

There was no real reason why the American playwright should not have looked back. And, perhaps, there was no real reason why, looking backward, he should not have turned in so many instances into a pillar of salt. After all he was the expression of a young country that was still settling, not to say discovering, itself. Even when the century had paused to get its second wind, the majority of his fellow countrymen found themselves more at ease in the task of subduing a continent than they were self-reliant in the small talk of their drawing-rooms. The playwrights of America, like its society leaders — as Mrs. Mowatt's *Fashion* makes all too clear — were infected with the belief (today it would be referred to, of course, as a complex, an inferiority complex) that anything which came out of the Old World must be better than anything that could come out of the new.

They had been born into a theatre that, instead of evolving slowly towards its national form — as almost every national theatre in Europe had done — had been bodily transplanted from the banks of the Thames to the banks of the Hudson. And it took far more than an ocean voyage to have it undergo a sea change. Imitators these earlier playwrights were, and with reason. For with them their desire for imitation was but a sign of national adolescence, of that

formative period in which the ideal is always to be like rather than to be.

Meanwhile, however, the American type was slowly coming into its own, and the theatre opening its doors to native material and indigenous heroes. *The People's Lawyer, Mose the Honest Fireman, Fashion, Davy Crockett, Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Octoroon* are but typical milestones on the road to self-discovery. While they can make but meagre pretensions to literary value, they do at least indicate important steps towards independence in subject matter. More than that they serve to indicate that the American playwright was gradually waking up to the new, untried and vivid materials at his very doorstep. And in doing that he was beginning to evince an inclination for the repertorial; an inclination which in a few years was to grow into one of his most pronounced characteristics.

As time went on and the West was developed and the back countries tamed by settlers from all the nations of Europe, the American dramatists began to find that the inheritance with which the new continent had bequeathed them was as rich as their own European antecedents were varied. Accordingly they set themselves increasingly to the task of making use of the new material which was theirs. In their treatment of it they may have continued to show how sedulous they were in aping the fashions that happened to be current in the theatrical capitals of the Old World. But by dealing with their native material at all — even in an imitative manner — they were preparing the way for our dramatists as we now know them.

The American playwright of today, however, is an entirely different being from the playwright of forty years ago, different in his attitude towards the theatre, different in his relation to it as well as in his relations to his actors

and his public. From a home-sick colonial he has developed in an incredibly short time into an independent and self-reliant figure, who though he still borrows the moulds of the Old World, has poured into them metals of a new and individual kind. In brief, he has naturalized the form — as a form — and even given it certain twists and characteristics which are recognizable the world over as American.

Certainly he can no longer be considered as a pretentious upstart or merely as an imitator. Too much ink has flowed under the bridge for that. He is the product of three generations of a kind of native playwriting which has not only gained a new vigor by its choice of new materials but which has also been heading towards ideals that are more consistent with his own. He is after all the direct descendant of James A. Herne and Bronson Howard, those earlier pathfinders along the trails of verisimilitude, of Augustus Thomas, William Vaughn Moody — whose *The Great Divide* (1906) is so often named by the historians as marking the dawn of the modern spirit in American dramaturgy — Eugene Walter and Edward Sheldon, playwrights who charted the course to the present by their increasing ability to deal with the American scene in effective theatrical terms; of Percy MacKaye and Josephine Preston Peabody, who, though now without apparent imitators, experimented in verse and dreamed of a more imaginative theatre; and, finally, of Langdon Mitchell and Clyde Fitch, who demonstrated that comedies of manners were not alien, as many had supposed, to American talents.

To expect the modern American playwright to work without being aware of the existence of at least some of the Europeans who have been and are among the major influences in the drama of his period would only be asking him to be either monumentally illiterate or blindly provin-

cial. Close as the pressure of their example may have been, however, he has not — save in a few cases — elected the servile rôle of copyist, because, to all intents and purposes, he has been no more affected by his European contemporaries than they have been by each other. Instead, he has had the good sense to see that by race, temperament and equipment he cannot hope to duplicate either what they have done or what they stand for as individuals. Realizing this, he has had his own say, using materials that he knows and writing, for this theatre of realism, plays that are based upon the reality he has encountered within the frontiers of his own experience.

In doing this he has made not only his strongest bid for popularity, but for importance as well. Because, though a national frontier in no way marks the limits of a dramatist's appeal, it does and must to a very considerable extent define, color and explain his work. For the dramatist is, in spite of all temptations to belong to other nations, the inescapable product of his nationality. He inherits its temperament, shares its spirit and reflects, even if unwittingly, something of its point of view. His material springs from the life around him, and the more devoted he may be to photographic realism, the more numerous are the surface details he employs to suggest reality to his native audiences.

When he emerges as a figure knowing no frontiers, who is at home before publics to whom his little sign-posts to truth may pass unrecognized, he does so by digging under the idiosyncrasies of racial differences until he strikes emotions that are fundamental to all mankind. Even when his theme is international, the dramatist never loses his national accent. *Hamlet* is English no matter into what country it may be carried and regardless of how many people it may move by being more than English. In the same way *Phèdre*

is French the world over, *Oedipus* Greek, and *Faust* German. Nor at his best does the dramatist try to forget his national accent which is the natural speech of his spirit. Instead he becomes, consciously or unconsciously, the exponent of his race by writing so authentically of the thing he knows and the people he has lived with and observed that he can persuade all audiences of his subject's truth. Even in his most parochial moments, the playwright can, if his heart beats to what is universal in the heart of man, emerge as a universal playwright. The variations of the outward garnishings that individualize, or nationalize, his work are limitless and offer the eternal variants of the restricted number of fundamental emotions.

That the contemporary American playwright realizes the value of these outward garnishings is beyond dispute. He is part and parcel, if not the chief exponent, of the realism that dominates the American theatre today. As a realist he has shown an uncommon skill in mobilizing his recognizable details, doubtless because of his genius for reporting. He has led his audiences away from the tawdry unreality of the older theatre and constantly presented them with more or less faithful transcriptions of the everyday "slices of life," as the unappetizing phrase has it. In his selection of material he has been even more democratic than the age of which he writes. Like most English-speaking dramatists since the days of *The London Merchant,* when clerks were elevated into tragic heroes for the first time, he has discarded Aristotle's snobbish doctrine that "Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are above the common level," often failing to see that Aristotle was no snob, and that by "the common level" he was not drawing a social distinction but a spiritual one, which showed his sharp awareness of how few people,

regardless of their station, are really capable of tragedy and how many are cast in the lesser moulds of pathos.

A rich abundance of high and low, type and character material is at the disposal of the American playwright to be employed in any of the various modes he happens to select. Occasionally, as in the case of such men as those outstanding playwrights whose work is discussed in later chapters, he faces his material honestly, stating it as he sees it rather than as he feels an audience might like to see it stated. Generally, however, with the competence which characterizes a good portion of his workmanship, he chooses as his ideal what an audience is willing to accept as possible rather than as probable.

He takes the American family — and his latitude of choice is as wide as these United States and as long as the varieties of families in each of them (to say nothing of Alaska) and he shows its members overwhelmed by the tragic or comic misfortunes that might overtake any man. Only he exercises the right, and his audiences prefer it when he does so, of slapping on a fairy book ending of happiness and sunshine and virtue triumphant, which never seems to make anyone question either his integrity as a realist, or the necessity of his having bothered to coat a Cinderella yarn with all the faithful details of realism. The truth is that the American playwright is fonder of observing details than of facing facts, and his public shares his preference. Accordingly, he can be counted upon to mobilize a host of accurately observed externals — that are not only possible but actual — even when he is using them to dress up a story that — to put it mildly — is neither probable nor possible. In brief, his customary choice is to spin a fable worthy of Grimm in a manner worthy of Sinclair Lewis.

It is because of his fondness for dodging the bitterest

realities of life that the average American playwright is at his best when he writes melodramas. Not, of course, the old-fashioned dime horrors. No, not those, because recently a new-fashioned melodrama has come into being that travels no longer in its old disguises. It does without the Elizabethan cauldrons that bubbled so pleasantly with apparitions, the Love and Honor twaddle of the Romantics, the smoked glasses of *East Lynne,* the treadmills of *Ben Hur,* and the sulphurous hands that still clutch so desperately at success from behind sliding panels. It has consigned "me Chee-ild" to a happy past, and forgotten, for the moment, the easy tears that well from the eyes of strong men at the merest mention of, "Mother, God bless her old gray head." It has outgrown its need of the old devices and given them a decent burial, if for no other reason than because it has at last arranged a happy marriage between the fairy book tale and the Sinclair Lewis manner.

In *Broadway, The Barker,* and *Burlesque* melodrama struck a new vein and established a new formula. Those swift-paced melodramas of cabaret and tent-show life, in which simple and familiar stories became novel, even entrancing, because of novel and entrancing settings, pointed the way. In their wake came the tradition of the "back-stage play" which has been — and still is — followed by a desperate hunt for untouched localities as an easy means of finding new frames for old pictures. The more bizarre the setting, the more the formula has seemed to work, because in the tent-show, the cabaret, the burlesque house, the night club, the speakeasy, and the lunch wagon are worlds where life itself has the unreality — even the tempo — of melodrama, where men and women are such exaggerated types that they offer ready-made the simplicity of character that melodrama demands, and that is often well within the gifts of the less

accomplished American playwrights. Here, in fact, are hurried, hectic, artificial worlds, where comedy and pathos are nicely jumbled, and where people are uncomplicated enough to be subservient to complicated plotting and yet seem as real as reality itself.

At bottom this new-fangled melodrama, with its wealth of striking superficials in both setting and speech, has been but a demonstration of the journalistic gifts of the American dramatist. And when, more recently, the search for a new locale sent the playwrights away from the night clubs and then into the prize rings, and finally out of the prize rings and into the press-room of Chicago's Criminal Courts Building in *The Front Page,* or to the city room of a large newspaper in *Gentlemen of the Press,* the routine American playwright, who has contented himself with working as a reporter rather than a dramatist, found himself back in his own office at last. Like Sir Launfal, he had travelled around the world only to find the thing for which he had searched waiting for him at his very doorstep.

It is not only in this new breed of melodramas that the American playwright has worked as a reporter instead of dramatist. In his more cynical moments of "debunking," when he has set out to pillory a person or an institution, he works in the identical manner: the manner of the correspondent rather than the artist. The tendency has become so acute of recent years that Robert E. Sherwood could write with more than a grain of truth in his preface to *The Queen's Husband:* "As a result of the dominance of this journalistic tradition, we have developed a literature that is hemmed in on all sides by city-desks — a literature that is not literature but 'copy,' dedicated to a muse who wears a green eye-shade, wields a blue pencil and asks in a cold, contemptuous tone, 'Have you verified this?' "

Mr. Sherwood holds that the critics for whom our playwrights write are the products of the "journalistic tradition," and adds that the dramatist must himself be a good newspaper man to endear "himself to the critic, and to the cash customers, or boobs for whom the critic speaks. . . . He must be literal. He must 'get down to brass tacks,' and 'come down to cases.' He must never, under any circumstance, expose himself to the damning charge of sentimentality. He must establish himself as an iconoclast, a misanthrope, a fearless expositor of the mediocrity and hypocrisy of life. He must be hard-boiled, sophisticated (in the Broadway rather than the dictionary sense of the word). He must be illusionless, and, like all other successful Americans, he must be 'he.'"

These are the "musts" of the successful American playwright as a successful American playwright sets them down in protest. They are responsible for the increasing tradition of "the low-down" in our theatre as well as in our literature. "The object of the low-down," continues Mr. Sherwood, "is to destroy illusions, by exposing the hokum from which illusions arise. Well, that's splendid, but it ought to be obvious that the wholesale slaughter of illusions would be disastrous to the theatre, which survives solely because of its ability to create and sustain the illusion of reality."

It was because a few dramatists sought the illusion of reality even more keenly than they had yet been able to create it in the theatre's customary moulds that they broke from the ranks of the conventional playwrights who had carried realism to the ends of the earth in the form of the "well-made" play. To them the very planning of the regulation three-act play was so artificial that it was in itself a transgression from the paths of truth. It involved, as they saw it, finding a situation, and distributing it through three

or four acts of a certain arbitrary length without regard to how the length of the act was fitted to the strength of the material.

These insurgents wanted to treat not one incident and one climax but a series of incidents and climaxes. They did not want to put one complication in a man's life under the microscope, but run, if need be, the full gamut of his days. They wanted to dispense with the padding and to come down to the essentials. Accordingly they came into the theatre, bringing with them that more scattered and subjective form of playwriting which has been tagged with the heavy label of Expressionism, and in which a staccato series of episodes or scenes were presented that gave only the determining crises in a character's development.

The Expressionists have cut a comparatively small figure in the American theatre. Many of them have been faddists who have turned to this freer form for no other apparent reason than that they hoped its freedom would be a paradise for their inexperience. Some of the Expressionists (the best of them, needless to say) have been the playwrights whose preoccupation has been not with the form as a form, but with a thing that they wanted to say that had to be said in this particular way. All of them, without regard for the merit of their performances, have aimed at catching something of the tempo and confusion of this modern age, this day of the towering cities and whirring machines before which they like to place the molecular tragedies of the man and the woman — any man, any woman, every man, every woman — whom they have picked out of the maelstrom to shadow for an evening. As extremists, if not as experimentors, though probably as both, they have been in a decided minority.

The men and women who are in the majority — and

hence establish the average quality of American playwriting — are the willing ones, who say what they have to say in the accepted form, hoping that it will be acceptable to the greatest number of people. Their first allegiance is not to their own tastes, but to what they hope will catch the fancy of the managers and their publics. Certainly this is but to be expected in a theatre that is as frankly commercial — in the most unembarrassed and blatant sense of the word — as is that of Broadway. For in that theatre the *norm* is as naturally the goal as the lowest common denominator is the god. Too frequently the worship of these twin gods of the box office makes for broad strokes rather than fine ones, for comic strips rather than true comedy, for the obvious rather than the subtle, for sentimentality instead of sentiment, and tends to dilute sophistication into terms of the mottos, the morals and the intellect of the widest majority. Too frequently, too, it results in an easy-going, good-natured kind of drama which succeeds in being amusing far more often than it attempts to be moving.

Profundity has never been, and is not to this day, one of the outstanding characteristics of the average American playwright. The majority of our dramatists have a cheerful way of avoiding the depths and bobbing merrily along the surface, of seeing happy solutions to all problems, of distributing switches to the bad and gold stars to the virtuous with the ease of a Sunday School teacher, of reducing the ineffable anguishes and complexities of life to the stereotyped bromides of a form telegram on Mother's Day, and of pursuing small lives for their smallness without sensing the greatness their smallness may encompass.

Their dialogue is too often the safe harbor of the banal. It is amusing as far as it goes, but it is endlessly trivial and wearisomely thin; weather talk of an empty variety which

functions only as the willing servant of the plot it is manufactured to advance. It prattles but it does not probe. Employed neither as an instrument for self-discovery nor an outlet for beauty, it is as simple and as shadowless as the ready-made types from which it emanates. It is dogged by a truly American fear of betraying education, misgivings or imagination. Its wisdom is its common sense, the shrewd, axiomatic common sense of business slogans and the self-help ads. It shows an effortless gift for the appraisal of external values and a relentless determination to go no further. It speaks from the throat, not from the mind; the heart and not the soul. The people who utter it come apparently from bookless homes and have no worries except the law, the bootlegger, summer vacation, love and money.

This process of deifying the norm and falling prostrate before the lowest common denominator may not clip as many wings as one might at first suppose, but it does clarify certain characteristics of the rank and file of American playwrights who seem so happily fitted to it. It goes a long way, if not the whole way, toward explaining the popularity of the fairy-tale version of realism. It points out, too, why so few Americans are unable to write comedy without broadening it sooner or later, though most frequently sooner, into funny paper farce. It has its bearing on why it is that melodrama should have achieved a native excellence, and why it is that a reporter's theatre should be faithful to a reporter's paper and so commonly employ a style that is well within the reach, and usually below the average, of the majority.

In telling their shallow fables of the everyday, the lesser run of our playwrights are apt to show a fair competence as play carpenters. Often in a single play these people make their mark, saying the one thing they have to say with such sincerity that they command the attention of

audiences. But, having said that one thing, observed, even felt, from the fund of their own experiences, they vanish and are lost in the outer fringe of the obscure, the permanent amateurs, and are never heard from again. They can write from what they know, after their fashion and to the limit of their capacity for truthful observation. They realize all too well that that which is written from direct knowledge is bound to speak with authority in a theatre dedicated to the factual. Having misgivings about the world beyond their own experiences and their own front porches, they confine their dialogue to the levels of what the average man may say, and their action to what he may do. Their own willingness to be dictaphones to the dullness of the everyday, the tireless photographers of mediocrity, shows how seldom any of the journeyman playwrights are ever stirred to rebellion by the bolder voice of imagination.

The fidelity to formula that is characteristic of American playwrights cannot but have a stultifying influence on the theatre for which they write. In the last analysis, from the Greeks to the present day — with the exception of that madcap and improvised theatre of the *Commedia dell' Arte* — it has been the playwright who has given the theatre of each age its opportunities, if not its quality. And it is the limits of his imagination which are to a large extent the limits of the imagination of the theatre of his time.

It is after all the playwright who comes first. It is he who gives the actor his say, and thus determines the scope of his art, the very style and nature of his development. If the actor is forever at the mercy of his dramatists, so are all the other forces of the theatre, even when, as within the last thirty years, a new life and a fresh impulse have transfigured so many of the theatre's subsidiary arts. The designer — particularly if the playwright is still alive and able

as well as anxious to protect his own rights — can create only what the dramatist has set down. He ceases to be a designer at all if the playwright gives him nothing to design or to interpret, and becomes only a little more, or a little less, than a third-rate interior decorator if he is perpetually asked to employ his gifts in planning kitchens, middle class parlors, actual court-rooms and hall bedrooms to suit a playwright's whim. The director, also, is denied a free, rich, personal use of his talents if he is asked only to deal with those scenes over tea-cups and around sofas and stoves in which so many modern scripts abound. And so through the long list of the theatre's servitors.

They are even more dependent upon the playwright and what he gives them to do than they, perhaps, would care to admit. Certainly they have never been more subject to him than in the contemporary theatre, in which the playwright has emerged not only as a playwright but also as an author, who is taken seriously in his own rights, who considers his play as an intellectual entity, and who prides himself on what he has himself to say rather than because of what he may have given another person to say.

Fortunately, for audiences as well as actors and directors, there are playwrights who in many ways justify their new importance, men like Sidney Howard, George Kelly, Philip Barry, Paul Green, and, above all, Eugene O'Neill, who have emerged as figures with something to say as well as a way of saying it; strong, vivid talents that command respect, and speak in their own rights as individuals. They are the exceptions who aid in determining both the average quality and the average daring of their fellow craftsman by rising above them. And as such they are as important as they are welcome.

Philip Barry

It is in his dialogue that Philip Barry shows himself to be more fully possessed of the comic spirit than is any other practising American playwright. He alone is able to fill his stage time after time with people who, while they belong in reality to this world, seem to be the gay property of a world of his own invention. To be sure his characters look and act like other people. They are warmed by the same sun, cooled by the same rain, and vexed by the same dilemmas that we are, even if they are not dressed by the same tailors or watered by the same watering places. But in facing their problems they speak a joyous, light-hearted language of their own which — at Mr. Barry's best — cannot only obscure the sheen on a familiar situation, but lift a fact above its cold realities and push it over into that realm of glorious nonsense of which only high comedy is capable.

They play a game, a snobbish game if you like, that is meaningless, even irritating, unless you approach it in the spirit of gleeful ridicule with which they attack it. You cannot bring to it the sober standards of your Hamsuns and O'Neills. You must forget the red table cloths of your regional drama to enjoy it; and forget, too, those Calvinisms — both spiritual and presidential — to which as an American you have undoubtedly been exposed. You must forget them because this game of mad-cap banter which his characters play is never halted to make certain that you are in on it. It does not stop because its major premise — which is the

major premise of all high comedy — is equality. Not that equality which was set down in Magna Carta, or in that other document to which the original John Hancock was appended, but the equality of the Social Register. It takes for granted not only that the author and his audiences are equals socially and intellectually, but, what is far more important, that they also share that greatest test as well as that most ultimate privilege of equality — the capacity for laughing at the same thing, at the same time and in the same way.

This game to which Mr. Barry sets his characters is played by well-dressed people who belong to that world of comfortable means which has always been — and must ever be — the background of high comedy. Its worries are the luxurious grievances that indolence and wealth alone can breed. For not only are its characters to the manner born (as modern America understands the term), but they are also to the manor born (as the word is understood in Westchester County and the East Sixties and Seventies). Moreover, they are, in their own way, cosmopolites who enjoy their intermittent flings at Paris, London, Antibes, Cannes, and St. Paul du Var. But, though they belong to what Upton Sinclair would dismiss as a stuffy world of moneyed respectability, neither they nor their world is stuffy by the time Mr. Barry has endowed them with his banter.

Certainly the game his men and women engage upon is not stuffy, in spite of all the shortcomings it may have. It is written by one of the few American playwrights who does not have to rent a dinner coat to write a comedy of manners, of a class that approaches the game as peers; slightly bored, fully aware of the failings of their kind, but possessed of its lucky ones who speak the same language and

are ready for the same intellectual releases. It is a special world — undoubtedly trivial in its worries if you judge them by the loamy fundamentals of the giants of the earth and the empire builders. But it is young America, mannered, wise-cracking, collegiate; the world of the second and third generations of today, painted as personally in each play as if it were a first novel.

It is America just dwindling into matrimony as Congreve would express it; faced in *Paris Bound* and *In a Garden* with the problems of divorce as they present themselves in their most *editions de luxe* form. It is a world, as it shows itself in *You and I* or *Holiday,* or even in that far less successful farce-comedy, *The Youngest,* that is considerably aware of "Art" (spelled with a capital of course) and agitated by those clear-cut decisions which, according to Mr. Barry, must always be made by sensitive people between "Art" or "Personal Freedom" and "dat ole davil" of the contemporary theatre — "Big Business." It is a sensitive world, however, fed up with plenty, yearning for something else as in *Hotel Universe,* though usually for nothing greater or more profound than "finding itself." But at least it is a world that feels an intangible awareness of its lacks which is deep enough to challenge its own facility of expression. Certainly Mr. Barry's treatment of it, witty and delightful as it is, is not faultless, either as plot material or as high comedy. But in each of the "above-stairs" comedies in which he has dealt with it, he has managed to restate this world in his own terms and to give it a style that is unmistakably his own.

He does this most especially by the bantering game of mock-heroics to which he sets his characters, and by the glib but meaningful dialogue he puts into their mouths. It may be that game of preferences, played between the wife

and her returned lover, which raises the second act of *In a Garden* to memorability. It may be the patter of Ricky and Ronny, the young lovers in *You and I,* or that superb parody of an American success saga which was written in the Donald Ogden Stewart tradition and spoken by him as Nick in *Holiday.* It may be the scene between Mary and Jim directly after their wedding with which *Paris Bound* opens; or the moment in *Hotel Universe* in which three grown men discuss religion as if they were so many schoolboys, yelling "Jew," "Cath'lic," and "Protestant-dog-sit-on-a-log-and-eat-meat-on-*Friday*" at each other. But in any case it is definitely stamped with the marks of its authorship.

Watch Johnny Case in *Holiday,* for example, who is not rich enough, nor "fixed" enough, to walk with such assurance into that enormous Fifth Avenue living room and ask old Edward Seton, "financier and cotillion leader" for the hand of his daughter, Julia, and you see Mr. Barry in a typical moment, turning an old scene topsy-turvy by the ingratiating freshness and the mock bravado of his speeches. The great Mr. Seton is still at church. But the young Setons realize that their father's objections to the marriage are certain to be strong. More than that, they know him and his kind well enough to foresee exactly what they will be. Accordingly, Linda, Julia's sister who has never seen Johnny before, and Ned, her brother, prepare Johnny Case for his ordeal.

"See here, Case," says Linda, "I think you need some coaching. . . . Have you anything at all but your winning way to your credit?" "Not a thing," Johnny admits. "The first thing father will want to know," continues Linda, "is, how are you fixed?" "Fixed?" "Fixed — Are you a man of means, and, if so, how much?" "I have in my pocket now, thirty-four dollars and a package of Lucky Strikes. Will you

have one?" "Thanks," says Linda, taking a cigarette from him. "But no gilt-edged securities? No rolling woodlands?" "I've got a few shares of common stock tucked away in a warm place." "Common?" cries Linda, feigning horror. "Don't say the word. I'm afraid it won't do, Julia. . . . He's a comely boy, but probably just another of the vast army of clock-watchers."

It is Ned who now comes to the rescue from behind his newspaper. "How are you socially?" he asks. Johnny has to admit there is nothing in his favor on that score either. "You mean to say your grandmother wasn't even a Whoozis?" shudders Linda. "Maybe he's got a judge somewhere in his family," suggests Ned helpfully. Linda seizes upon the idea. "Yes, that might help. Old Judge Case's boy. White pillars. Guitars a-strummin'. Evenin', Massa." Once again Ned proffers aid. "You must know some prominent people. Drop a few names." Linda toys with the suggestion. "Just casually, you know: 'When I was to Mrs. Onderdonk's cock-fight last Tuesday, whom should I see but Mrs. Marble. Well, Sir, I thought we'd die laughing—.'" To which the prosaic Julia replies, "This is a lot of rot, you know." But Johnny, speaking for Mr. Barry and those many members of his audiences who are playing the game, answers, "I'm having a grand time."

It is a grand time that Mr. Barry gives his characters, allowing them to spoof to their heart's content, and providing for their spoofing dialogue which, on the whole, is more consistently fleet than any of our dramatists can write. Sometimes the lines are gagged with such obvious, but none the less laughable, undergraduatisms as "I didn't stroke the Vassar crew for nothing." Sometimes they are of that "bookish sort," which, as Thornton Wilder once expressed it, "people who do not read Charles Lamb imagine to be

like him." Seldom, however, as Mr. Barry uses them, are they allowed to have amusement as their only goal. The reason is of course that his comedies, in spite of the gay mockery of their speech, are saddened, tender, whimsical tragedies at heart. They do not pillory an institution, "exposing," as Hazlitt said, "the follies and the weaknesses of mankind to ridicule." They may laugh at the absurdities of a class and poke fun at contemporary Americana, but their laughing correctives are incidental, not direct. Occasionally they may speak the language of high comedy, but almost invariably they are swayed by the emotions of sentimental drama.

Mr. Barry's characters have hearts, which is contrary to the tradition of sheerest comedy. They invite our sympathies rather than sway our reason. Beneath the veneer of their glibness most of them "lead lives of quiet desperation"; such lives of hidden self-pity as Matey leads in *You and I,* as the father does in *Paris Bound* and Linda in *Holiday,* or as that group of people do who assemble on a terrace in *Hotel Universe* to plumb the mysteries of life. They do not ask for those callous judgments by which we appraise the Witwells, the Fainalls and the Mirabells. They draw upon our compassion by reaching out to that very self-pity which most of us manage to bury deep within ourselves. Nor are they shadows raised above the moral law. Instead they are emotionalists who, for the most part, are its willing and expressive subjects.

They do not stray into that "land of cuckoldry," that "Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty and manners perfect freedom," of which Lamb wrote in defining the artificial comedy of the Restoration. Of remorseless malice they are as innocent as they are incapable of superiority to human standards. Though they are the products of an age

in which men and women are rated as equals, facing life on the grounds of that sex equality which Meredith pointed out was necessary to all high comedy, neither Mr. Barry's men nor his women belong to the tradition of heartless comedy, which is the great tradition of all high comedy. They are too unfitted for independence, and too susceptible to love to make the battles of their courtships or their marriages more than petty skirmishes. They play an enchanting game with one another, instead of living coldly by the brittle radiance of their wits. His women, in particular, are not made of the stuff of which the Millamants and the Celimenes are made. They are not, in spite of their modernity, the self-reliant masters of their fates. On the contrary, they are, as Meredith would call them, "wandering vessels, crying for a captain or a pilot." They may laugh at their love in their speeches, but their very mockery of it is the surest sign of its existence, betraying as nothing else could their self-consciousness before it and anticipating their surrender.

Nor does Mr. Barry, like Congreve, "spread a privation of moral blight" over his world. For, in spite of its sophistication and the paradoxical manner in which he treats it, his is a very moral world. In each of his plays — with the exception of *Hotel Universe* which found him vaulting into the saddle and riding off as rapidly in all directions as if he had been a Stephen Leacock hero — Mr. Barry has approached this world of his with a definite thing to say, a theorem to prove, or a preachment to make. In *In a Garden* he shows how different are the motivations of life from the purely arbitrary motivations of literature. In *Paris Bound,* disguised by the comic felicity of his dialogue and his seemingly unconventional point of view, he preaches a most churchly sermon against divorce, basing it on the debatable idea that occasional infidelity is pardonable, when — and

only when — a husband and a wife are truly in love, because then a mere physical transgression can have nothing to do with the real ties that bind them.

Mr. Barry does not as a rule take the chances with his underlying ideas that he does with the rippling banter of his dialogue. Because, though the conversation of his characters is based on the assumption that it is a game played by equals, the exposition of his ideas is not. They are baldly stated, hammered home with the nervousness of all democratic playwrights, said not once but twice, so that everyone is certain to be aware of what he is up to. Indeed it is only in the Freudian gropings of *Hotel Universe* that Mr. Barry is reticent about his underlying ideas. And then his reticence seems to be more the product of his own uncertainty than of anything else. Elsewhere, however, he not only writes his lessons clearly on the blackboard, but uses a ruler to point them out. In *Holiday,* for example, though the idea is considerably less didactic, even less substantial, than are most of Mr. Barry's *motifs,* it is solemnly summarized by Johnny Case as, "You see, it's always been my plan to make a few thousands early in the game, if I could, and then quit for as long as they last, and try to find out who I am and what I am and what goes on and what about it — now, while I'm young and feel good all the time."

In each of his plays you will find that Mr. Barry ceases to laugh when he stumbles on the idea upon which the play is founded. His comedy fades from him, and his banter subsides into rather sententious plain speaking. Watch him in *You and I,* where youthful marriage threatens to stand in the way of a son's architecture just as it has stood in the way of his father's painting, and you realize just how solemn Mr. Barry can be when he is faced with his own solemnity. It is Matey, the father, who speaks the caption of

the play as he talks to his son. "For a while," he says, "you need absolute independence — freedom to think only 'I — I — I — I and my work' — After marriage that is no longer possible. From then on it's 'You and I' — with the 'You' first, every time. '*You* and I.'" And, though Ricky may try to laugh this off with "Sound grammar, anyway," he cannot laugh off Mr. Barry's seriousness, which finds expression in the next line in such a high-flown sentence as "don't underestimate, either, the suffering a flouted destiny can send you."

The mid-way channel Mr. Barry steers between wit and pathos, laughter and tears, and those good old enemies — reason and whimsicality — is perhaps best shown by the manner in which he refuses to confine his "smart people" to their drawing-rooms. Like the song writers in *June Moon,* who must invariably be going back somewhere — back to Dixie, back to Ole Virginny, or to Mammy — his characters are invariably going back to their childhoods. The reversion may be incidental as it is in *Holiday*. Or it may be the pivot upon which the whole play tries to turn as it is in *Hotel Universe,* that most pretentious of Mr. Barry's offerings. But it is pretty certain to occur, if for no other reason than that the past is the natural ally of a writer of fantasy.

Almost always Mr. Barry's people dodge the gossip, the prattle, and the malice of their parlors and flee to a room "up-stairs" where the realities dare not enter. These attic rooms are their escapes, their refuges from high comedy, and Mr. Barry's complex. Because, rich as they are in their sentimental associations, they provide a ready-made setting for fantasy. The "up-stairs" room may, as in *Paris Bound,* be a "music-room on the top floor of the Hutton's town house in uptown New York, near the East River." It may, as in *You and I,* be an attic changed into a studio, or, as in

In a Garden, it may merely be a room made over, relighted and redecorated for an experiment. In fact, it may not even be a room at all, as is the case in *Hotel Universe,* but a terrace, a "fantastic terrace" of an old hotel on the Mediterranean which leads people back into their past by resembling other places.

But most of these retreats have for Mr. Barry and his characters the "special virtues" of that play-room in the Seton's stuffy town house, where Linda wishes to give the announcement dinner, "because the play-room's the one room anyone's ever had fun in!" Certainly, the virtues of that play-room are anything but heartless. "It has," explains Linda, "something to do with — when I was a child here — and this room — and the good times in it — and . . . Well, I tell you this room's my home. It's the only home I've got. There's something here that I understand, and that understands me. Maybe it's mother."

Twice so far Mr. Barry has deserted that special world, which is the favorite setting for his most characteristic comedies, to try his hand at other materials. In *John,* he broke with his whimsi-comical past to attempt a serious biographical drama about John the Baptist. In spite of the occasional beauty of his writing, it was an unsuccessful attempt, which failed because it was too prone to waver between the grand manner of historical plays and the trivial informality of more contemporary methods to achieve any coördinating style of its own. In the other play, however — *White Wings* — Mr. Barry conceived, even if he did not wholly write, one of the most hilarious and original of fantastic American comedies. He forgot the upper world of comedy and jubilantly descended into the lower world of travesty. In a setting as unusual as it seemed bound to be rich in comic possibilities, he restated the age-worn fight between the progres-

sive and conservative spirits, choosing as his representatives of the old order, the Inches, a proud family of street cleaners who for years had followed the horses — with a broom. As his radicals he selected the Todds, the first motorists, whose horseless buggy came quite naturally as a threat to the dependent livelihood of the Inches. But, though *White Wings* was delightful as an idea, and gorgeous in stretches of its Rabelesian dialogue, it was, as Mr. Barry stated it dramatically, too slim to bear the weight of four long acts. It began to repeat itself, to run thin of complications, to seem a one-act distended to fill an evening.

The attic retreats that recur in the more typical of Mr. Barry's "above-stairs" comedies are not only the shelters that he seeks from the conscienceless ridicule of high comedy. They are also indications of the mixed mettles from which his comedies are made. For his are not pure comedies either by intention or in execution. They are too diluted in their methods to serve the Comic Muse unswervingly. They are comedies that laugh in order to preach rather than preach in order to laugh. They are comedies, too, that stoop to farce, such farce as the drunken scene of the secretary in *In a Garden,* or such a wickedly insensitive scene as that between Nichols, the novelist, and Etta, the housemaid who poses as Matey's model in *You and I.* But more marked than either their descents into farce or their ascents into the pulpit is the fact that Mr. Barry's comedies are of a kind which cry into handkerchiefs instead of laughing behind fans.

They are whimsical comedies, not high comedies. And as such they are softened by the rose-colored lights of sentiment rather than being subject to the white glare of pure comedy. As such too they are written from the heart more than from the head, and find Mr. Barry pouring the cham-

pagne of his dialogue into tear bottles instead of serving it in the glasses that the purists would demand. In his mixture of sentiment and laughter, pathos and wit, however, Mr. Barry is but obeying one of the oldest of Anglo-Saxon theatre instincts. Most generally he compounds the two so that each works for the other's advantage. But occasionally his tenderness gets the better of him, deadening the fine buoyancy of his writing and robbing his dialogue of its necromancy. It is in those moments when he turns mawkish and is inclined to let his whimsicality slip over into what Mr. Nathan has rightfully objected to as "whim-whim," that Mr. Barry would do well to listen to the sound advice that his Mary gives the composer in *Paris Bound*. "Watch out," she says, "that your angel doesn't go whimsical on you." Mr. Barry should watch out, too. Because when his touch is purely comic, it is one of the most engaging that our theatre knows.

George Kelly

A NATURALIST, once contended Brander Matthews in a moment of unprofessorial definition, is a man who refuses to paint your picture unless you have a wart on your face. If he had been thinking of George Kelly instead of Nineteenth Century France, Professor Matthews would not have been compelled to alter his definition greatly. For Mr. Kelly, who stands out from among our playwrights as such a conscientious realist that he might almost pass as a naturalist, is at his naturalistic best when he is dealing with men and women whose natures are not without their blemishes.

It is not the good people whose blood runs thickest in his tragi-comedies of middle-class suburbia. Nor the big ones. Indeed, they are either absent from his scripts, or present as such anæmic negatives that their absence becomes desirable. But it is the petty, humdrum mortals of everyday living, whose pulse beat is the most vital on his pages. It is the mean people, and the absurd ones, the weak ones and the little ones, whose souls are small enough to fit beneath the microscope through which he studies them.

The reason for this is that, though Mr. Kelly is a naturalist in his love of facts, he is at his best when he is a satirist in his use of them. In either capacity his aptitude is for human frailty, and the heroic is not his concern. As a satirist his gnawing hunger is for the weaknesses of mankind. Not, to be sure, the mighty defects out of which tragedy is made. Because, as a naturalist, Mr. Kelly's pre-

scribed diet consists, just as it is bound to consist, of plain living, plain thinking and plain people. Accordingly, it is not the gods that his men and women disappoint, but themselves that they irritate.

Their frictions, when he is most accurate in recording them, are the small frictions that loom so large in daily living. Indeed, it is their very smallness which makes them true to large audiences by bringing them safely within the reach of their experience. If the annoyances which test Mr. Kelly's characters are homespun, it is because the cosmos of his people is, almost invariably, no larger than their homes. In fact, except for the hilarious second act of *The Torch-Bearers,* when Mrs. Pampinelli's amateurs are doing their amateurish worst at Horticultural Hall, Mr. Kelly's men and women are the most confirmed of stay-at-homes, who are not to be found away from their own hearthstones. They may touch the outside world by working for the Pennsylvania Railroad as Aubrey Piper does in *The Show-Off,* by journeying to Atlantic City as Cliff Mettinger and his niece do in *Daisy Mayme,* or by returning from Albany as Mrs. Craig does at the beginning of *Craig's Wife.* But the box of salt water taffies which Miss Plunkett carries with her from Atlantic City's boardwalk is just about as near as his characters ever come to remembering what they have seen and done beyond their own doorsteps. For when they once are within their homes, Mr. Kelly makes his people forget the outside world as quickly as he bangs their doors against its worries.

His people do not visit, nor do they make visitors welcome, any more than Mrs. Craig makes Mr. Craig's aunt welcome, or Laura Fenner makes Miss Plunkett and Mr. Filoon welcome in *Daisy Mayme.* Their homes are their fortresses, just as they are Mr. Kelly's clinics. Be they ever so

humble, they are all that he requires in the way of a laboratory. Even when he is diagnosing the case of such an upper class derelict as Antoinette Lyle in *Behold, the Bridegroom* — a woman who has been everywhere, seen everything and had everything — it is in her home that he prefers to study her.

If God does not exactly bless Mr. Kelly's homes — until just before his final curtains — it is because the irritations which they present to his small people are sufficiently ample to test them — and to find them wanting. From their attics to their old heaters in the basement, these homes of Mr. Kelly's are the real villains of his plays, the silent antagonists, the *dei ex machina,* who in their own calico way take the places that the fates once filled in the drama. Not only do they serve for his people as the centre of their universes, but they are also their symbols of property and ambition. And as such they bring out all that is best and worst in them, and unleash the meanest of their acquisitive instincts. They stimulate his men and women to envy and accentuate their greed. And they keep their dispositions at that low boiling point which is so necessary to the crises of domestic drama. For more than merely being dwellings, these homes of Mr. Kelly are the baits he sets to catch his characters — and their numerous in-laws — at the pettiest of their everyday meannesses. As such they lead Aubrey Piper in *The Show-Off* into enlarging upon the braggart lie he lives by boasting to a stranger that it is he who owns the Fisher home and suffers his in-laws to stay with him. As such, too, they cause the Fenners in *Daisy Mayme* to dislike Miss Plunkett for no other reason than that her arrival at Cliff Mettinger's weakens their hold on a home which might otherwise have been theirs. Of all the homes in Mr. Kelly's plays, however, none is more actual as a living, ever-present

character than is that unpleasant temple of immaculateness which is not only Mrs. Craig's obsession in *Craig's Wife* but the key to the whole play.

Quite rightly Mr. Kelly takes no end of pains in establishing the reality of these homes in which he places his people. Quite rightly, because by establishing them as real, he offers his audiences, as it were, a tangible guarantee for the reality of the men and women who live in them. The heaters and the hangings of these homes of his are the outward ways in which — as a scrupulous externalist — Mr. Kelly documents his people. They are the visible facts upon which his satire is based and from which it is derived. And they are, too, his sagacious way of underwriting its enlargements and giving them their truth. Accordingly, Mr. Kelly turns his all-seeing, Sears-Roebuck eyes upon the smallest details in these houses. Accordingly, too, he invites his audiences into his people's homes, asking them, as his inhospitable characters would not be inclined to do, to feel as if they were really part of them. And, due to his thoughtful direction, one finds one's way around in no time, learning what trolleys to take, what the neighbors are like and what Philadelphia thinks of the neighborhood, where the dog sleeps, where the kitchen is, and whether or not you should use the front or back stairs in going to your room.

The pains that Mr. Kelly takes with the insides of his homes, he also takes with the outsides of his characters. Here, too, he is most vivid when he works as an externalist, seeing his people from one angle and stating them simply in the terms of their predominant traits. His men and women, particularly in the earlier and the better of his long plays, are types, individualized — nay brought to life — by virtue of their eccentricities. And it is by the same means that they invite remembrance. They have their pronounced

idiosyncrasies of speech which set them apart even when they are not set apart by their physical oddities. Mr. Kelly's ear for the absurdities of his characters' talk is even keener and more unsparing than is his eye for what is ridiculous in their appearance.

Often, however, Mr. Kelly's people are individualized in both respects, as is Aubrey Piper in *The Show-Off*. Aubrey, indeed, is more than a case in point. He is the perfect illustration of Mr. Kelly's methods at their best, and of the way in which he goads his characters into exposing themselves. Watch him when he is actually bringing Aubrey on to the stage, and you see how quick Mr. Kelly is to seize upon the absurdities of a character, to underline them in red ink, and to project them. You see, too, how strong, and yet how amusing, his reliance upon external details may be. And you realize that Mr. Kelly is a dramatist who has not written vaudeville sketches and been a headliner in the two-a-day for nothing. The braggart Aubrey has already been irritating Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, and their son Joe, by charming Amy in the parlor with his laugh and the asinine breeziness of his talk. Now he comes into the living room, checkered suit, toupee, laugh and all.

"Stay right where you are, folks, right where you are," he says as he enters, and moves immediately to the mirror over the mantelpiece. "Just a little social attention — going right out again on the next train." While Aubrey surveys himself critically in the mirror, touching his tie and his toupee gingerly, Mrs. Fisher gives him a smouldering look. Nothing fazes the irrepressible Aubrey, however, for he turns away from the mirror and says, after indicating his reflection with a wide gesture, "There you are, Mother! Any woman's fancy, what do you say? Even to the little old carnation." He gives the table a double tap with his knuckles,

then laughs, and moves up towards the kitchen door, and calls out to Amy: "Come on, Amy, step on the United Gas out there; customer in here waiting for the old aqua pura." Now he moves down to Mr. Fisher's right. "Man's got to have something to drink — how about it, Pop?" he exclaims, giving Mr. Fisher a slap on the right shoulder. "You'll stay with me on that, won't you?" he asks, laughing and moving up to the mirror again. Old man Fisher is very much annoyed. "Yes, sir," continues the oblivious Aubrey, moving forward again at the right, "I want to tell those of you who have ventured out this evening that this is a very pretty little picture of domestic felicity." He laughs a little, and looks from one to the other, patronizingly; but nobody pays the slightest attention to him. "Father reading — Mother knitting"; (Mrs. Fisher withers him with a quick look) "But then, Mama is *always* knitting." She knits rapidly and Aubrey laughs, and moves up and across back of the table. Then he continues, "And little old Tommy Edison over here, working eighteen hours a day to make the rich man richer and the poor man poorer." He gives Joe a tap on the back, and then moves back again towards Mr. Fisher. "What about it, Popcorn?" cries Aubrey, slapping Mr. Fisher on the back. "Shake it up! Right or raving?"

To all of which Mr. Fisher not only answers by jumping to his feet with a very natural "God damn it, let me alone!" but also by exclaiming, "I never saw such a damn pest in my life!" Nor did any one else. For, though Aubrey is like any number of the other liars, braggarts and minor egoists who can be met in smoking rooms, or offices, or who may live across the way, he is exactly like none of them. With his carnation, his toupee, his laugh, his appalling breeziness, his catch phrases such as "sign on the dotted line," and his unquenchable desire to seem more important than he is, he

calls the whole tribe of his fellow fools to mind. Yet he is definitely himself, his theatrical and his vaudeville self. He is like his fellows, for he is of their kind and the faults that they possess as individuals are recognizable in him. But, in spite of the weaknesses he may share with them, he is unlike them — as Mr. Kelly draws him — because in his own very individual way he is the sum of them and their defects.

It is when he is dealing with such individualized types as his Olly Kipaxes, his Mrs. Pampinellis, his Mr. Filoons, his Mrs. Fraziers, and his Aubrey Pipers that Mr. Kelly is most expert. They come readily from his pen as people who live in their own rights even while they serve as types in which living people can be recognized. He is at his best, too, when he is amused by these silly characters of his and by their vanities, rather than when he is annoyed by them. For, though his satire is barnacled with details which he uses without pity, it is most effective when its general attack is good-natured.

When, on the other hand, Mr. Kelly grows really angry, as he did in *Craig's Wife,* and is so determined to father a universal type that he forgets to create an individual, his writing loses its edge. It becomes heavy-handed and unforgivably obvious, a thing of values that are written as large as if Borglum had carved them on the mountain tops, and as far removed from the microscopic scale of everyday reality which is Mr. Kelly's special forte. The reason is that, though Mr. Kelly takes life seriously, he has not yet been able to state it seriously. His realism fades from him when he ceases to put it to a satiric use.

When Mr. Kelly frowns, his dialogue ceases to have the tang of reality, and goes coldly bookish or impossibly sentimental. It loses both its character and its characteriza-

tion, and becomes so commonplace, that in *Craig's Wife* Mr. Craig can point an accusing finger at Mrs. Craig, and ask in the dehumanized speech that is so common to problem plays, "What have you ever done, or a million others like you, that would warrant the assumption of such superiority over the men you're married to?" Or, it becomes so stilted that Antoinette Lyle, the upper class heroine of *Behold, the Bridegroom,* who dies of a case of plain repining which would have delighted Dumas-fils, can say of the prig whose virtues lead her to the realization of her own shortcomings, "I have seen the man, at whose bidding I *might* rise to the fulfillment of any worth that's in me."

Worse than the control Mr. Kelly loses over the contemporary idiom when he turns serious, is the control that he loses over his sense of facts. In *Behold, the Bridegroom,* for example, he shows that when he takes his moral too soberly, he not only ceases to be a modern realist but becomes a Nineteenth Century romanticist who just happens to speak the language of Freud. Not only does he take to pressed rose-buds and repining, but he also reverts to a death-bed manner that was the stock-in-trade of would-be serious dramatists for a half a century after Dumas wrote *Camille.* He sends his Tony tottering into the living room to die, with her hair dishevelled above her ashen face and the inevitable negligee wrapped close around her repining body. And then he has her say — among many other ultra-violet things — as she looks into the eyes of the prig who does not love her and for love of whom she is dying: "You seemed to symbolize something for me that in my madness I'd lost sight of. It was very curious. And as I've thought it over during the past few months, I've concluded that *you* were the first man that ever appealed to the maternal in me. For as I watched you that first day — you were a strange

mingling of the man and the little boy. One moment I saw only the man — who attracted me; and immediately I decided upon my usual campaign — that had been so successful with many a man before you — And then I'd see the little boy. And it suggested what a little boy of yours might look like. And that *did* something to me — a kind of casting out of the seven devils, I suppose. For at that point I decided to withdraw — in favor of a woman who could go to you — as a woman *should* go to her husband. I said to myself, 'This man deserves a better fate. And that — little boy of his (purely a figure of speech) — deserves a better mother.'... You see, I can be very impersonal with you, Mr. Train; for, as I told you, I knew from the first — that my cause was lost."

Though Mr. Kelly is to be admired for that integrity of his which makes him go his own way regardless of what people may think of his work, it is a pity that his later-day seriousness has led him away from the satire and the material upon which his reputation is founded. It is a pity, for as a moralist he has ceased to write as he once did. To be sure, he was a moralist even when he wrote such a rollicking satiric farce on the Little Theatre movement as *The Torch-Bearers,* and such realistic satires as *The Show-Off* and the less sharply edged *Daisy Mayme.* But he was still a satirist. And as a satirist — preaching simple, homespun sermons — he was a moralist who laughed.

Paul Green

You may join with the many in claiming that New York is not America, or feel with Sidney Howard that "by every artistic standard, the real pity is that America is not New York." But the very fact that you cannot say what America is — except in so far as you happen to have touched it, or it happens to have touched you — is the reason, and not the excuse, for the hopes that are increasingly invested in the development of our so-called regional or folk drama. It is the reason, too, why the work of such an intensely local playwright as Paul Green — who writes only of the North Carolina in which he has lived — commands an interest which is as special as his subject matter.

Among the many of our playwrights who have sought to make dramatic use of the customs and idiosyncrasies of the Little Americas which combine to form these United States, Mr. Green is the only one who has fully explored the new region that he has opened up to the drama. The others have, in most cases, turned down the by-paths that lead to regional types, as if they were so many summer visitors. With notebooks and pencils in their hands — to say nothing of the summer visitor's condescension in their minds — they have sought out the natives (whether they happened to be Down-Easters, Cowboys, or Southerners) and asked them to be characteristic, which was only their way of asking them to be odd.

Occasionally, these visiting playwrights have so succeeded in catching the flavor of the locality they were

reporting in this play or in that, that New York audiences — who have never seen the place and for whose edification the reporting has been done — have been glad to call their work authentic. But generally these wandering minstrels have been so anxious to amuse the provincials in New York that they have failed to consider what they might be doing to the provincials with whom they were amusing them. Like the true hunters they have been, these playwrights who have set off deliberately on the trail of human oddity, have felt their first duty was to bag their game and bring it home, rather than to leave it happily alive in what the Natural History Museums are fond of referring to as its native habitat. Seeking specimens rather than people, these copy-hunters have once again fallen into the ways of real hunters; killing and skinning their game in order to carry it off with them, and then relying on their own kinds of dramatic taxidermy to revive it for that dusty life after death, which is the regulation fate of trophies of the chase.

The fault has not lain exclusively with the American playwrights if they have erred in believing, as they undoubtedly have, that a mountain woman could be as easily forced into a George M. Cohan plot as an elephant's head can be mounted on the walls of an old club room. Because, until such playwrights as Mr. Green emerged, the general assumption seems to have been that every American playwright was capable of writing authoritatively of all other Americans, for no other reason than that he happened to be an American playwright. Indeed, this axiom of dramatic composition has been as widely respected as its corollary still is, which holds that no American playwright is to be trusted when he writes of the love life of Marie Antoinette or Catherine the Great for the simple reason that he is an American playwright, and cannot, therefore,

have enjoyed the intimacy with either Marie or with Catherine which all modern French or Russian playwrights are supposed to have enjoyed as a part of their birthrights.

Be that as it may, Mr. Green has appeared, showing in such of his long plays as *The Field God* and *In Abraham's Bosom,* and even more notably in his several exciting volumes of one-acts, what the potentialities of our folk drama really are when the light of genius is thrown upon its wealth of fine materials. He does not write as an outsider, looking for oddity to which he can be condescending, but as a native, deeply rooted in that "vast and fertile coastal plain" from which both he and his characters have sprung. And so persuasive does the truth of his observance appear to outsiders, that it seems but inevitable that such a man as North Carolina's Professor Frederick Koch should hail Mr. Green's plays "as indigenous as the pine tree to his sandhills." Or that in seeking to illustrate his point this same Professor Koch, who has carried Mr. Green's short plays up and down his native state in the repertory of the Carolina Playmakers, should be able to cite the case of a Carolinian, who declared after seeing one of them, "I know every member of that family; it's all true." For Mr. Green writes with a first-hand knowledge of his black and white farmer folk which could only come to a dramatist who, like himself—as he once expressed it in a letter to his friend, Barrett H. Clark—"grew up on a farm and for twenty-three years saw nothing else."

Certainly the North Carolina that lives and labors and loves and kills in Mr. Green's lyrically volcanic plays is not the America that Broadway recognizes as its own, or that any of our major dramatists have claimed as theirs. Its simple folk, its ignorant whites and lowly blacks, and the land with which they battle, is as far removed from Mr. Kelly's Phila-

delphia, or Mr. Barry's whimsical attic retreats, as Synge's Irish peasants were from the tailored gentry with which Pinero and Maugham were delighting a contemporary London. Not only do his people dress differently from the men and women who usually occupy our stages. But they feel and think differently, and they stand in a different relationship to an entirely different God.

The God his whites and blacks both worship is a real and terrifying God that haunts the human heart even as he haunts the heavens. He is, too, a personal God, whose name is ever on their lips, either in the hymns or spirituals that are their constant libations to His wrathful being, or in the vivid imagery of their daily speech. Though they refer to Him tenderly as the Ol' Master, the justice He metes out is as far from tenderness as it is from justice. For He is an indignant God who cannot be appeased; a violent, mysterious, persecuting force, fashioned in the hard terms of these people's living, who blights and crushes far more often than He blesses or caresses.

He is the God of strong emotions that can no longer be chained and of orgiastic "hallelujahs" that must be out; the singing, shouting, jubilant God of negro prayer meetings and white revivalists, who seems happiest when He is breaking those who serve Him blindly and destroying the human dignity of those who come to Him annually for salvation. He is the God of crops, who, as Mr. Green tells us in *Unto Such Glory,* "we begin to think about . . . when late July and August come," and the corn is hilled and the cotton ploughed for the last time, and "every little church from Bethel to Shiloh is rocked for a week by the fighting paradox of God and the Devil. Then it is that the way of the transgressor grows hard. Little children are herded terrified into the fold, the drunkard denies his dram, the

profane man softens his speech, and shy, tough-knotted old fellows with land lawsuits greet each other gently as 'Brother.' Then, too, the way of the chicken grows hard. He is slaughtered by the thousands and his plucked feathers blown heavenward by the impersonal winds. The smokehouse suffers its onslaughts, the bin is visited and revisited, the pig is snatched and barbecued, the watermelon and 'mushmelon' patches are devastated. The tired housewife sings 'Blessed be the name,' sweats and grows sick before a red-hot stove, and the farmer's last dollar is pleaded forth from its hiding-place. For now it is that the preachers are abroad," that the big meetings will be held, and that the "heavenly grafters" who have existed since "the time of Piers the Plowman" are ready to overrun the land.

Certainly this God that the oily brethren serve and that jittering frenzy pleases, is not an impartial God. His favorites are, of course, the whites, whom He rewards by holding out the hope of peace after death. And His stepchildren are the blacks, those most reverent and child-like of his worshipers. "De nigger is down, down," says Abraham McCranie, the striving black man whose defeat is chronicled in *In Abraham's Bosom,* and "De white man up dere high, setting up wid God, up dere in His favor. He git everything, nigger git de scraps, leavings." His kindness to the Negro does not increase because of the black man's humility. "Dey humble," cries Abraham. "What do God do? Starve 'em to deaf. Kill 'em off lak flies wid consumption. Dey dying 'long de river same as de chillun in de wilderness." And the answer for such blasphemy as this of Abe's, is old Muh Mack's. "You blaspheaming, da's whut you doing. No wonder Gohd take yo' babies 'way, no wonder he make yo' mule die, blast down yo' plans and send de crows and cold weather and root lice to destroy yo' craps. (Her eyes flash-

ing.) You gut to change yo' ways. Some day He gwine re'ch down from de clouds and grab you by de scruff o' de neck and break you cross He knee.... You gut to fall down, pray, git low, git humble. (Her voice rising into a semi-chant.) You dere, Jesus, heah my prayer. Dis heah sinner, he weeked, he blaspheam. Save him and save dis po' liddle baby."

Both the white men and the blacks who serve this stern God that punishes piety even as He prohibits logic, are a poor and simple lot. They are a lonely people, travelling down a lonesome road. And their loneliness is made all the more acute because they cannot, dare not, trust each other, any more than they can or dare look upon one another as people. The white men range from the Croatan outlaws who are killed off by a feud in *The Last of the Lowries,* to the amiably dull farmers who dance the Virginia Reel and laugh at the mossy wheezes of "The Arkansas Traveller" in *Saturday Night.* And on the way they include convict guards who know no mercy; village idiots such as Sion Alford in *The Field God,* who can twang his harp and sing in his high voice,

I wisht I was a snowbird
With nothing else to do,
I'd set in the top of the apple-tree
And make sweet music fer you—
Good-by, my lover, oh, tell me good-by;

farmers whose beards are wet with tobacco juice; drunken gossips; quack doctors; sheriffs; misers; young white men like Ed Roberts in *The End of the Row,* whose loneliness forces them into love affairs with young negresses, and old-time slave-owners such as Colonel McCranie, who, in both the long and short versions of *In Abraham's Bosom,* raises

the whip on the trembling body of his own black son. The white women are of the same simplicity: stonily religious as is Mrs. Gilchrist in *The Field God;* or beaten down, pasty and thin-chested as is Mary in *The Lord's Will,* or Cumba the withered mother of the Lowries, or Ida, who is the miser's victim, in *Old Wash Lucas.* They may be school teachers, as Miss Charlotte and Miss Annie are in *The Picnic,* or town girls as is Rhoda in *The Field God,* but in no time they belong to the land which claims them.

So, too, do the Negroes, who as Mr. Green sees them, have "borne the brunt of the brutal dirty work" of "the so-called humanizing" of the community in which they live. "Living in the vilest of huts, the prey of his own superstition, suspicions and practices, beaten and forlorn before God Almighty himself," the Negro has, as Mr. Green states it, "struggled helplessly in the clutch of affliction and pain." It is not the Negro as a type of whom Mr. Green pretends to write, but the Negro that he has himself observed "through a number of years on or near a single farm in the coastal plain." And in his writing, Mr. Green brings out as no other of our dramatists has done before, the Negro's naïveté and his gripping fear, his longings and his defeats, his sudden violence, his child-like sweetness, his innocence and his joy, and his exuberant animality as they have shown themselves when he "has matched his strength with the earth that bore him."

Mr. Green's blacks have a sweating actuality. Their hands are calloused with the toil which has bent their bodies. And their labor is made as much a part of them as is their joy and fear. When, for example, the curtain rises on *The End of the Row,* "a high monotonous singing is heard off the right, punctuated by the 'hanh-hanh' of hoes tearing through the dirt and grass." When those mellow,

luscious voices work their way nearer enough to make such words distinguishable as:

> *Shout hallelujah, hallelujah to de lamb,*
> *Early in de mawning, death is on de way*

one voice rises above the others, crying, "Come on heah, you slubbering niggers! Cain't you keep up wid a' old 'oman." And in a few moments, a stout and sweating Negress enters, "carrying her hoe" and "stamping the dirt and dust from her feet." Having entered she boasts once more of her prowess with the hoe, sits down in the shade and, crooking up her leg, "begins picking at the bottom of her bare foot. 'Lawd,' she cries, 'dem li'l' saw-toof br'ars sho' do play thunder when dey git in 'tween yo' toes.' "

That same "hanh-hanh" of the hoers in *The End of the Row* is the litany of labor that rings out in both *In the Valley* and *In Abraham's Bosom.* Its beats the tune of the workmen's axes as they swing against the trees in the turpentine woods, or the picks of the convicts as they crack rocks in the noon-day sun. But whether it is a song of triumph, or a dirge that touches the heart, it — or something like it — is a vital factor in that rhythmic beat which is almost muscular in all of Mr. Green's plays.

Mr. Green's Negroes are too truly drawn to be melancholy as a group. It is only the few of them who strive to rise above their race, and when they do it is their race that defeats them. The majority of them are gay, vital, care-free animals; "hawgs" and poets all at one time. Their spirits run high with the joy that is their protection against their destiny. A song, a dance, a banjo, a good meal, an unexpected kindness, an excitement which stirs their senses without bothering their minds, is enough to make them forget their troubles, and laugh as only they can laugh.

Watch Mr. Green when he makes two Negroes who have killed and robbed, seek protection in Aunt Mahaly's haunted cabin in the swamps, and you feel the fear which can terrorize his blacks, even as you realize that with them it is their imaginations which take the place of their consciences. Listen to the young liar, who is the Black Playboy of the Western World in *The No 'Count Boy,* as he parades his fancies before the little girl who wants to travel, and you understand the poetry that comes almost ready-made to Mr. Green's pen. "Street cyars running," cries the boy, describing the city he has never seen, "wid nothing pulling or pushing 'em. And high buildings so high dat de moon breshes de top. High! Lawd, Lawd, how high! And people hawling money wid trains, big train loads whah dey keeps it in a big house wid a school breaking of folks to guard it."

In the one-act called *The Fiery Furnace* which was later rewritten as a part of *In Abraham's Bosom,* Mr. Green shows another side to the Negro. It is old Muh Mack again who is speaking, this time to Douglass, the worthless bounder, who is Abe's son. "I had to light a rag outen Rocky Mount," boasts Douglass to his Granny, " 'case I gut in trouble over a woman dere — a mommer whut swung de jelly-roll, too." To which Muh Mack replies, with pride in her voice, "I be bound you gut to git in wid de women. But you's 'herited my spo'ting blood." Douglass looks at her narrowly, agreeing, "We been roundahs, hain't we?" This fills Muh Mack with pride, wringing from her a happy, "Hain't we dough! Hit's de onliest life foh dem whut has grit in dey craw."

There is a moment which has something of the same flavor in *The End of the Row,* only it is more unabashed in its animality. Aunt Zella has been taunted in the presence of her daughter Nora with the fact that she had Nora before she was married. Her answer is a roar of laughter, and the

proud boast, "I sho' did. But dey won't no so'headed nigger her daddy. Hit was a white man and one o' de stroppingest dey is walking. Now you cain't say dat much, kin you? Haw, haw, haw!" It is the same pride that leads Aunt Zella to make fun of Lucille because "white men ain't never tuk" to her, and say in the presence of her daughter, "You 'spects my gal to consort wid a nigger raght off de bat? She kin do dat later."

It is with the rich raw materials provided by these simple whites and simpler blacks that Mr. Green works. He shows them in their moments of gaiety and in their bleaker hours of defeat. He shows them, too, fighting against their God even as they fight against themselves. He sees the weaknesses and the virtues of both races, and to both of them he extends his pity for the problem that they present to each other. He is too wise to offer any solution to this problem which knows none. But in the place of empty preachments, he puts his own clear-eyed sympathy. And it is at once so direct and so eloquent that it breeds a new compassion.

He states things as they are — unflinchingly and undogmatically. Indeed he sees them so much more in their own terms than in the special terms of the theatre that he is often as crude in his dramatic means as his rough-hewn characters are in their living. He takes nature itself — its logs, "rotting in the embrace of wild ivy," its maples, its bays and its dogwoods; its hog-killings and its soaring buzzards; its swamps, its swamp owls and the mocking birds that burst "into a lively chatter on the pear tree near the garden"— and he bravely, blindly endeavors to cram it and all its living detail into that band-box that we call the stage. If it does not fit, if it is obviously the kind of detail which the theatre cannot use, he does not care. It is the theatre's

ill luck, not his. For these maples and these mocking birds of his are as much a part of his way of seeing things as they are a vital part of the people into whose lives he sees so deeply.

By no stretch of the imagination could Mr. Green be called a disciplined playwright. His means have the simplicity, even the naïveté, of the folk with whom he deals. And, though he has written one-acts which O'Neill alone has equalled or surpassed in this country, he has yet to show that he has the strength to sustain a long play. But Mr. Green has something far more to his credit than technique, in a land that bristles with so many competent but dull technicians. He has something to say. And in his manner of saying it, he shows himself to be a poet, even before he is a dramatist.

His plays throb with music — not only the music of the spinnets, the banjos and the guitars which ring out in them all, or of the hymns and spirituals into which they constantly break — but also of the rich, cascading melody that is natural to the daily speech and "the sweet potato" voices of his people. As he scores their dialect, with his poet's ear, it stirs with rhythms which have something of a Biblical magnificence about them. And as he uses their everyday words, he fills his sentences with an idiom which is as picturesque as it is moving in its innocence. Little wonder, therefore, that Barrett H. Clark should say, "The more I read of his significant work, the more firmly am I convinced that Mr. Green is doing for our drama what the writers of the spirituals have done for Negro music." Because, by limiting himself to writing only in the verbal and emotional idioms of the North Carolina people that he knows, Mr. Green has not confined the drama. Paradoxically enough, he has extended its province.

Sidney Howard

If the quality of Sidney Howard's playwriting is more easily definable than is its style, the reason is that he, less than any of our major dramatists, has a style that is inalienably his own. His plays, vigorous and intelligent as they are, are special to themselves rather than to him, disclosing their ownership of him far more than they betray his ownership of them. They are not derived from any abiding point of view which reiteration has revealed as his, but written with that topical enthusiasm which a roving reporter musters for each new assignment that falls his way. Nor do they bristle with the identification tags, nay the claim checks, with which such of Mr. Howard's contemporaries as Mr. Barry, Mr. Kelly and Mr. O'Neill have stamped their work. For Mr. Howard is not one of those authors whose touch is unmistakable.

Unusual as it is for a dramatist of his abilities, and especially unusual as it is for one possessed of his forceful individuality, there is no such thing as a subject that is exclusively a Sidney Howard subject, or a method of treating it that is immediately recognizable as a Sidney Howard method. He has staked no claims either upon a special world or a special class which is the recurring setting for his dramas. Neither are his scripts set apart by manners of phrasing or habits of thought which are so pronounced that they can pass with triumph through the ordeals of a blindfold test. His characters are as far removed from one

another as are the backgrounds of their actions; as completely divorced in fact as are the Renaissance Italians who strut through *Swords* from the fruit-growing wops of the Napa Valley who supply *They Knew What They Wanted* with its local color. And so, too, are the superficial manners of his approach.

But, though Mr. Howard's style is so variable as to be almost non-existent, the qualities — the positive, highly personal qualities — which persist in each of his very different dramas are not. And it is by means of these qualities rather than by the style which they can boast that Mr. Howard's plays admit their authorship. Almost all of them have, for example — if one excepts, as one must, such a flabby study of divorce as *Half Gods* represented — a hard-hitting, plain-spoken vigor which is very much Mr. Howard's own. They are uncommonly keen, too, in the whole manner of their attack, brisk in their action, and shrewdly observant in their characterization; written with an enthusiasm for the strong words and big scenes of the actor's theatre that is as contagious in its verve as it is naïve in its surrender.

Whether they happen to be such a youthful attempt at costume romance as *Swords,* such a plotful yarn of bootleggers and regional types as *Ned McCobb's Daughter,* or such a frankly forensic discussion of mother-love as *The Silver Cord,* they share a gusto — and a penetration — that is common to them all, betraying in their every line that there is something very square-jawed about Mr. Howard's playwriting, something that is as forthright as it is vigorous, something likeable that has a punch, a wallop, which repeats itself and belongs especially to him among our present-day dramatists. It is a kind of Rooseveltian vigor, born of a Rooseveltian "wrath at the sluggard" as well as a Rooseveltian "love of the larger vertebrates." It is not disturbed by

doubts that run too deep, or depressed by problems that cannot be stated, for it sees things as positively as it expresses them. Accordingly, Mr. Howard's people, who in the main are endowed with his own exuberance, do not content themselves with carrying the big stick. They also refuse to speak softly.

Mr. Howard's dialogue is terse, clear-cut and trenchant, meant to be spoken and written to be understood. His thinking is energetic with an equal clarity; so clear in fact that it often more than borders upon the obvious. Of this obviousness, however, Mr. Howard is not a little proud, because as a practical man of the theatre — or rather as a convert from murky verse and high-fallutin' heroics who has turned with a convert's zeal to the realism that the practical theatre enjoys — he believes in the obvious. "I do not believe that any man can justify a deliberate avoidance of the obvious," he once wrote in the militant preface he affixed to *Lucky Sam McCarver,* that least obvious and most deeply satisfying of his plays. "Obviousness," he continued, "possesses the essential merit of being easily understood and completely comprehensible. That is an excellent thing to be — particularly in the theatre."

Though Mr. Howard followed his defense of the obvious by a line in that same preface which declared that "there is no good in falseness however effective it may appear," the truth is that most of his plays are not innocent of that falsity which their obviousness necessitates. Frequently, they pay the price of being over-clear, suffering not as entertainment but as drama that is to be seriously considered from the distortions into which their heavy underscoring leads them. Not only do they belong to the theatre — the practical, hard-boiled theatre of audiences that are as large as they are mixed — more than they belong to Mr.

Howard. But they also reveal him playing — and enjoying — that theatre's game far more than they show him speaking for himself in his own plays.

In spite of their intelligence, and the commendable vigor of their writing, they indicate that Mr. Howard wavers, as Mr. O'Neill does not, between the truth as he himself sees it — and the truth as he feels it must be stated so as to be effective in the theatre. Accordingly, they find him adding to his own shrewd statement of either a character or a situation, values which are false to them but true to his own sensing of his task. The reason for this is that Mr. Howard's plays are actors' plays, written under the spell of the theatre and streaked deliberately with its grease-paint by a man who curtly deprives the dramatist of his literary pretensions by describing him as a "vicarious actor who happens to write well enough to be useful to real actors."

As actors' plays that are useful even before they are truthful or personal, Mr. Howard's scripts take their style not so much from what he has done in them as from what he has given others to do in them. To be sure, they are not vehicles in the old or tawdry sense of the word, because just as they are too intelligent and too individual for that so also are they too generous in the manner in which they distribute their acting honors. But vehicular they are in spite of that, smudged intentionally with stardust and skilfully fitted to the modern actor's range by a man who is so willing to grant preëminence to his players that he proudly admits "the best that any dramatist can hope is that his play may be a worthy vehicle." Mr. Howard's plays are vehicles, the worthy vehicles of realism, written as "shows" rather than as plays by a man who revels in the joys that the game of showmanship holds for its contestants. Hence it is that they are almost gleeful in the manner in which they submit

truth to a double exposure, displaying the truth as Mr. Howard sees it at one and the same time that they are displaying it as he has enlarged it to embrace an acting opportunity.

Hence it is, too, that his plays, which succeed so well within the mere limits of showmanship, abound in ready-made acting opportunities. They are rich in parts that speak themselves, that seem to move and gesture — indeed to act — even when they are encountered on the printed page. His people are characterized with a pungent surety, based on recognizable truth, and true to it, but truer still to the professional wants of actors. Run through the list of them, taking for example the excellent acting chances that are offered by the little waitress, the old Italian and the hired man in *They Knew What They Wanted,* the hard-boiled opportunist and his aristocratic wife in *Lucky Sam McCarver,* the slangy East Side bootlegger and his shrewd New England sister-in-law in *Ned McCobb's Daughter,* the sentimental mother and the coldly scientific daughter-in-law in *The Silver Cord,* and you see how astute Mr. Howard is, not only in creating his characters but also in projecting them in terms of their acting points. Almost all of them are selected — and built — for crises, for moments of tension when the voice is raised. And in every case they are set against opposites, who emphasize their basic traits even as they bring them out.

In his contrast (which is always violent) and his action (which is ever brisk) Mr. Howard steers a theatrical course. Often, however, as in the case of such a swift-moving tale of bootleggers as *Ned McCobb's Daughter,* the bold obviousness of his showmanship leads Mr. Howard perilously close to the oldest devices of the Down East melodramas of yesteryear. But even when he is relying on such

reminiscent dramatic means as a country girl and a city guy, to say nothing of a half mad old sea dog, the local constabulary, and a foreclosed mortgage, he is unashamed by them. Furthermore, he is able to rise above them by the salty gusto of his writing, and by the skill with which he can — in the middle of such hokum — contrast New England cupidity and conscience with the unctuous crookedness of the East Side.

The obvious means Mr. Howard can bring to his statement of a plot, he can also bring to his statement of a problem. In *The Silver Cord,* for example, where his concern is the strong hold that a widowed mother can have over the affections of her sons, he frankly presents his problem as a problem. And as a problem he dramatizes it craftily and well, from the standpoint both of his public and his players. But so fearful does he seem of taking any chances with his idea, that he overdramatizes it, subjecting it to an unnecessary coat of grease-paint. So anxious is he to argue his case and reach the breathless moments of centre stage rebuttals, that — half-way through — he tosses his characters overboard and settles down to presenting points of view instead of people. His Mrs. Phelps rules her home and her sons by the insidious weapons of sentimentality and a self-imposed martyrdom. Picturing herself as an invalid, and suffering from convenient but imaginary heart attacks, she thus gains pity as a means to sovereignty. Not content with holding her sons close to her as children, she tries to hold them close to her as men. She can forgive Robert his affair with an actress, even though it was an expensive one, but she cannot forgive him for being engaged to Hester, any more than she can tolerate the thought of David's being married to Christina. By every unfair device known to Mother's Day she sets to work to recapture the love of her boys, and suc-

ceeds in breaking off Robert's engagement just as she almost manages to break up David's marriage, for the simple reason that she has not learned the solemn truth of Hester's remark that mothers should "Have 'em. Love 'em. And leave 'em be."

Sensing mother-love as a problem, Mr. Howard argues his case with the blunt directness of a skilled dialectician. His handling is as intelligent as it is workmanlike. But so blunt and so direct are his methods, that what starts as a comedy of manners in the drawing-room climbs inevitably into the rostrum to become a public debate over which Mr. Howard presides as a none too impartial chairman. In the process, his people begin to lose their identity as people and to become mere sandwich men for ideas. He cartoons, for example, rather than subtly records, the truceless warfare between head and hokum upon which his sentimental mother and her scientific daughter-in-law are engaged. And in so doing, he does harm to two characters who give promise of being among the most felicitously drawn of any of the people he has created. Theatrically effective as Mr. Howard's heavy underscoring may be, the truth is that it scarcely makes for dispassionate argument in *The Silver Cord*. For Mr. Howard gives his play to his women, and grants his men so little stamina that they always seem as safely within their mother's clutches as they are unworthy of being saved from them. And the result of Mr. Howard's desire for simplification — for the thing that is easily, too easily understood — is not only that he overstates his women as he understates his men, but that he frequently comes near to reducing his play to caricature.

Though Mr. Howard may paint with a broad brush in *The Silver Cord, Ned McCobb's Daughter* and *They Knew What They Wanted,* it is unfair to assume that it is the only

brush he uses. As proof that it is not, one has only to turn to *Lucky Sam McCarver,* that failure of Mr. Howard's which followed upon the heels of such a success as *They Knew What They Wanted,* and which to this day stands not only as the best of his plays but as one of the best plays that has come out of our contemporary theatre. To be sure, *Lucky Sam McCarver* is not an experiment in the sense that the faddists would use the term, because, as Mr. Howard pointed out in his preface, "it was not produced in an art theatre and none of the actors wore masks." But for all that, it was — and remains — a brave and welcome escape from the humdrum ways of an all too humdrum theatre. In it, though Mr. Howard succumbed at times to the "dull devil of melodrama" which has always tempted him, he spurned the regulation ways of theatre plotting to write a dramatic biography. In four episodes he sought to chronicle the "rise of a typical New Yorker." But if his episodes concern the rise of one New Yorker, they also include the fall of another, for Mr. Howard's interest is not placed in one character alone. Instead he divides his time, and the attentions of his audience, between the ruthless ambitions of the self-made Sam McCarver and the whims and personal code of the Carlotta Ashe he marries. Before either can be understood, each must be set against the other as foils.

Each has virtues mixed with failings, because in *Lucky Sam* Mr. Howard was resolved that his characters "should do and say what they would, as people, have done and said rather than what the dramatic situation might seem to require of them." Dodging the usual "single-mindedness" of dramatic characters, Mr. Howard creates neither a villain nor a hero. With a fine honesty, and a skill he has never excelled, he shows that Sam has his tenderness as well as his cruelty, and that Carlotta has her cruelty as well as her

tenderness. She has the aristocratic pride her birth has given her, just as Sam has the eager determination for self-advancement that his humble birth has given him. Their codes are as different — and as irreconcilable — as the worlds from which they have come. Where Carlotta is at first necessary to Sam as a means by which he can advance from the night club he owns to the sphere in which she moves, she becomes a deadweight holding back his progress. The twisted society into which she introduces him in Venice is neither what he needs nor wants. Accordingly, when he has drained his alliance with Carlotta of its last drop of usefulness, Sam discards both her and her world, putting business before his consideration for her, even in the moment of her death.

It is *Lucky Sam McCarver* that is the key to Mr. Howard's best abilities. It is the most personal of his plays in that it is freest from compromises with theatrical effectiveness. And it is the least obvious, too. It benefits by the vigor that belongs to all of them. But by virtue of its dogged and unswerving honesty, it stands above them all, indicating that, as surely as the Grand Central Station has an Upper and a Lower Level, so there is an upper and a lower level to Mr. Howard's writing. The pity is that Mr. Howard, who can write with the best of them in our theatre, has not planted both of his feet firmly on that upper level since the dark day that *Lucky Sam McCarver* failed.

Eugene O'Neill

It was, some say, a beer bottle thrown through a window in the home of President Wilson that removed Eugene O'Neill from the list of Princeton's undergraduates. Be that as it may, it was with a larger and more typical gesture of defiance, aimed at larger and less accessible gods, that, a short seven years later, this same O'Neill introduced himself in print to a theatre that would have none of him. For it was in 1914 — a year that will always deserve to be remembered for other things even if it is never remembered for this — that Richard Badger issued in Boston a slim volume of one-acts for the publication of which James O'Neill, the author's actor-father, probably paid from wherever *The Count of Monte Cristo* happened to be playing, if indeed there was at that time an unvisited tank town in the country in which this good old melodrama still could play.

The volume, which consisted of five resolutely terrible and immature guignols that are bad enough to bring encouragement to the most discouraged of beginners, was called *Thirst and Other One Act Plays*. And, though its author has since managed to keep it out of the collected editions of his works, it has an interest in connection with his maturer writing which cannot be denied. For in its own way, this volume that is no longer published is a baby picture of the attitude towards man and God and life which was later to be O'Neill's. And being his baby picture, it is a photograph that finds him frowning.

One has only to turn to the title playlet in the collection to feel an authentic impact with that persevering frown of his; to become aware, too, of other budding qualities which were soon to distinguish him from all of his contemporaries. Because in this hectic sample of juvenilia, in which three very thirsty but equally voluble unfortunates are discovered shipwrecked on a raft in the middle of a glassy sea, the O'Neill whose fondness for symbolism has always been marked, was crying in his cradle. Already he was feeling that the tropic sun which parched his people, more than being just a tropic sun, was also "a great angry eye of God." And having brought an angry God into his drama he was even then pitting an angry man against Him in a conflict that was bound to be unequal. His statement of that larger antagonism was as crudely melodramatic as only his life at sea and his reading of Jack London could have made it. But, when he raised the fists of one of his characters against that God and forced him to scream, "God! God! What a joke to play on us!", he was already trying, in his guileless way, to warble the notes of that song which all the tragic dramatists have sung.

The second playlet, called *The Web,* is no less determined in its attempt to connect the misfortunes of its puppets with forces larger than themselves and over which they have no control. If anything, it is even more dogged in its resolve to see life grimly and to state its grimness in the grimiest of grim terms. Not only does it laugh hoarsely at man's injustice to man by delighting in a sordid tale of murder in which the innocent person is arrested as the guilty one, but it piles up its horrors so unsparingly that in no time they become the perfect parody of their own conscientious unpleasantness. Its very setting is heavy with these fallacies — both pathetic and dramatic — by means of which

only a sad young playwright, whose sadness was wholesale, could hope to finger-print the miseries of life. Its squalor is relentless and excessive. For not only is the scene a hall bedroom on the top floor of a rooming house, but it is a hall bedroom in which everything rejoices in decay. The wall paper is torn and dirty and the plaster shows beneath. The mirror over the washstand is cracked. The table and the chairs are rickety. And one look through the window which opens on a fire escape is enough to inform you that it is raining outside.

The owner of so many tragic luxuries is, as Mr. O'Neill describes her with a considerable dependence upon the perception of his audience, a young woman of twenty-two who looks thirty. In her appearance, her dress, and her complaints, she is a creature that the eye of God has looked upon with anger, or has failed to look upon at all. Her hat is a gaudy and cheap affair with a scraggy imitation plume. Her jewelry is false. And her cigarettes are of the cheapest Virginia sort. An empty beer bottle and a dirty glass are on the table at her side. The deathly pallor of her face, and the hollows under her wild and feverish eyes, ought to make it plain that she is suffering from consumption. But if these are not enough, other clues to her malady are not lacking. "From time to time, she coughs — a harsh, hacking cough that shakes her whole body. After these spells, she raises her handkerchief to her lips — then glances at it fearfully."

When she has listened to the monotonous sounds of the rain falling on the flags of the court below and thrown her cigarette wearily on the table, she finally speaks, saying the one thing she could say, "Gawd! What a night! What a chance I got!" If so far she seems merely a somewhat ridiculous creation of a young playwright who is determined to enjoy "the pain of it," she soon emerges as a not unimpor-

tant sign-post to the later O'Neill. Because, when she has been unjustly accused of killing the man she loves and the realization of "the futility of all protest, the maddening hopelessness of it all" has come stealing over her in a stage direction, Mr. O'Neill has her become conscious of the thing of which he is more acutely conscious than are any of our dramatists. Like him, "she seems to be aware of something in the room which none of the others can see." And that most significant something is nothing less than "the personification of the ironic life force that has crushed her"; that self-same force which has played so large a part in Mr. O'Neill's writings from the time of such of his earlier sea plays as *The Moon of the Caribbees* and *The Long Voyage Home* to the day of such of his most recent experiments as *Strange Interlude* and *Lazarus Laughed*.

In attempting to deal with this force at all, Mr. O'Neill steers a solitary course in our theatre. He alone among our dramatists looks beyond his people to the agents that control them. His men and women are torn by worries which they do not — cannot — give each other, even as they are scarred by bruises which their strong arms are not strong enough to have inflicted on one another. They stray into no Utopia which is above the moral law. Nor do they lead those guarded, vicarious lives that make for the pleasant artifice from which high comedy is spun. They are not prattling shadows, strutting for the sake of recreation in a play-room of their own fashioning, but unprotected men and women, set down sternly in a world that is not man-made, who face its rawest issues with an awesome directness. Their curiosity extends beyond their neighbors' well-being, just as their woes are greater than their rent-day worries, because, instead of assuming their place among men, they search for their place in the scheme of things. Like Yank in *The Hairy*

Ape they want to "belong," to be a part of the life force and an expression of it, to feel the solace of an unavoidable submission to powers which are beyond their control, or the affirmation that comes from identifying themselves with the larger agencies that engulf them. They are the visible cogs in the invisible machinery of the universe, violent with its violence even as they are broken by it. They grapple with these mysteries as Jacob wrestled with his God.

They do not ignore nature any more than nature ignores them. They are near enough to it to have gained something of its strength, to have turned hickory in the way of Ephraim Cabot in *Desire Under the Elms,* to have felt his contempt for the soft ones who follow an easy God, to revel as he does in a hard one, and to feel the pride that he feels in matching his strength with the God of stones. "When ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's living in yew!" cries Ephraim. "God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones! Build my church on a rock — out o' stones an' I'll be in them! That's what He meant t' Peter! Stones. I picked 'em up an' piled 'em into walls. Ye kin read the years o' my life in them walls, every day a hefted stone, climbin' over the hills up and down, fencing in fields that was mine, whar I'd made thin's grow out o' nothin' — like the will o' God, like the servant o' his hand. It wa'n't easy. It was hard an' He made me hard fur it."

The forces with which Mr. O'Neill's people contend may be cruel but they are never indifferent. Unwilling to brood over his characters from afar, they enter in their daily lives as the silent, mocking witnesses of their doom, or the grimly active participants in their undoing. They are personal, finite gods whose interference is so immediate and undeviating that they lose no time in trusting oracles or priests to relay their intentions. They do not hide in the

shadows of the heath but palpably abide in the great hall of Dunsinane. It is because they speak directly, and because Mr. O'Neill seeks to have his audiences feel the impact of these greater forces as personally as both he and his characters feel them, that he has no other choice than to work as a symbolist. It is his only possible way of expressing inexpressible things. As a symbolist who is both a mystic and a romantic, his plays abound in tangible manifestations of divine concern, of the interest of the larger forces of the world in the small affairs of men, and of the close relationship that he believes to exist between Man and Nature.

His men and women belong to a fierce but a caring world. The eye of God may be angry but it is never closed. In *Anna Christie,* for example, the sea is so real and near an enemy that Chris, the old barge-captain father, never tires of shaking his fists at it. It is the sea which has separated Anna from her father, the sea which has ruined her life inland, and the sea which reclaims her and purifies her for Mat Burke. It is that same "ole davil sea" that gave the conclusion of *Anna Christie* a conviction for Mr. O'Neill that it has never carried for his audiences. To them it seemed a happy ending and a false one. To him, with his anthropomorphic vision of things, it was an unhappy ending and a right one because, though Anna and Mat had patched up their lover's quarrel, Mat and Chris were shipping on the same boat and all three of them were once more at the mercy of the sea. "It's queer," says Chris. "Yes — you and me shipping on the same boat dat vay. It ain't right. Ay don't know — it's dat funny vay ole davil sea do her vorst dirty trick, yes. It's so."

As close to the doings of the Cabots as the sea is to the fate of Chris, Anna and Mat, are the two enormous elms that stand at either side of the farmhouse in *Desire Under*

the Elms. As Mr. O'Neill sees them they are not ordinary trees, but agents of destiny. "They bend their trailing branches down on the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time to subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles."

The symbols Mr. O'Neill employs in his plays are many and various: the fog that lifts in *Bound East of Cardiff* when Yank's face has twitched and his body writhed in its final spasm of agony; the grotesque expression of the Congo mask that asserts a diabolical dominance over the flat of Jim Harris and Ella Downey, his white wife, in *All God's Chillun Got Wings;* the line of hills which stands for promise and for dreams, and beyond which all the wonders of the world seem to happen for Robert in *Beyond the Horizon;* the oil that is the expression of Captain Keeney's pride and that keeps him from turning his whaling ship homewards even at the expense of his wife's sanity in *Ile;* the gold that is the maddening obsession, and the illusion, of Captain Bartlett in both *Where the Cross is Made* and *Gold;* the door that opens inward on the couple whose marital relations are so closely analyzed in *Welded;* the procession of gaudy marionettes that parades on Fifth Avenue in *The Hairy Ape* "with something of the relentless horror of Frankensteins in their detached, mechanical unawareness," and that represents the upper world of indolence and wealth as it appears to Yank, the stoker; the fountain of youth that beckons Ponce de Leon onwards in *The Fountain;* the

complicated meaning of the masks in *The Great God Brown* and the very names of such of its characters as Dion Anthony (Dionysius and St. Anthony) and Cybele, the prostitute, who embodies the Earth Mother; the prostitute in *Marco Millions;* Nina who is the *erdgeist* of *Strange Interlude;* and the silvery laugh of Lazarus that rings out its melodious defiance of death in *Lazarus Laughed* — these are but a small fraction of the symbols within symbols which he uses to connect his men and women with the elemental forces that surround them, and to vitalize the outward facts of their lives in the terms of their spiritual meanings.

Whether he employs symbols or not, and he almost invariably does, the life forces dominate his plays, as surely as in *Strange Interlude* Nina Leeds is haunted by the thought of God the Mother, or as in *Dynamo* Reuben fights the battle between faith and science by denying the psalm-singing Fundamentalism of his father and dedicating himself to the worship of Mother Dynamo. Of recent years in particular, Mr. O'Neill's is a world that suffers because it is ruled by a male god, when it should have been ruled by a god reared in the maternal image of those elms that droop above the Cabot farmhouse in *Desire*. It is a world of a jargon that is increasingly Freudian and pseudo-scientific, in which, as Nina phrases it, "our lives are merely strange, dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father. The mistake began," says Nina, "when God was created in the male image. Of course, women would see Him that way, but men should have been gentlemen enough, remembering their mothers, to make God a woman! But the God of Gods — the Boss — has always been a man. That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural. We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother. Then we would have understood why we, Her children, have

inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into Her substance, blood of Her blood again, peace of Her peace!"

That same theology, that search for God the Mother, finds statement in another form in *Dynamo* in a speech, incidentally, which makes clearer than anything else could the dangers, the pretensions, even the absurdities which can overtake a spirit of enquiry that is as ambitious as Mr. O'Neill's. It makes painfully apparent the manner in which the dramatist of his earlier and middle periods has been temporarily replaced by the foggy-minded coiner of cosmic beatitudes. "You're like her — Dynamo — the Great Mother — big and warm —" cries Reuben to Mrs. Fife. Then he breaks away from her, to exclaim, "But I've got to finish telling you all I've come to know about her — how all things end up in her! Did I tell you that our blood plasm is the same right now as the sea was when life came out of it? We've got the sea in our blood still! It's what makes our hearts live! And it's the sea rising up in clouds, falling on the earth in rain, made that river that drives the turbines that drive Dynamo! The sea makes her heart beat, too!— but the sea is only hydrogen and oxygen and minerals, and they're only atoms, and atoms are only protons and electrons — even our blood and the sea are only electricity in the end! And think of the stars! Driving through space, round and round, just like the electrons in the atom! But there must be a centre round which all this moves, mustn't there? There is in everything else! And that centre must be the Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity, and Dynamo is her Divine Image on earth! Her power houses are the new churches!" And so on through many other exclamatory dis-

coveries on the part of Mr. O'Neill of the secrets of a life force that is new to him and that, as he writes of it, still smacks too much of the home-work he has devoted to its mastery.

The connection that exists between these larger agencies and the men and women of Mr. O'Neill's plays is more frequently ironic than tragic. Indeed, in many respects it is the acuteness of his sensing of the life force as ironic that has stood in the way of his development as a tragic dramatist. His irony is bitter, melancholy and unflinching. But as irony it does not rise above pain or exult in the manner of tragedy. It asks us to smile in a sad way at the savage joke that the gods can play on men far more often than it invites us to share the divinity that suffering can bring to man. Too often he leads his people downward rather than letting them rise again from hell, because his preoccupation is so frequently the trick — the dirty trick — that fate has up its sleeve, rather than the ennobling protest that the tragic dramatists have put into the hearts of men.

The undoing of many of his people is so certain that the interest shifts — as it does not in true tragedy — from the men and women who are tested and broken to the destructive agents that test and break them. The inevitability of their outward doom becomes of more importance than the inevitability of their inward undoing. Because instead of tearing the heart by the picture that he paints of the martyr's anguish in the arena, he permits the attention to fasten itself with a grim fascination upon the prowess of the lion that is bound to devour him. It is Mr. O'Neill's awareness of the sad humor in events that causes him in *The Emperor Jones* to send his terror-stricken emperor circling through the protecting forest until he stumbles out of it and into the hands of his pursuers at the very point at which he entered. It is that same obsession of Mr. O'Neill's with the perversi-

ties of fortune that causes him to have the emperor slain by one of the silver bullets that the natives have moulded in order to break the spell of the silver bullet which he has told them was his life's charm.

It is the same ironic view of circumstance which induces Mr. O'Neill — and Anna — to laugh at the end of *Anna Christie,* when Mat and Chris and Anna find themselves once more at the mercy of that "ole davil sea"; that robs Olson of his dream of returning to his mother and his farm in *The Long Voyage Home* by having him drugged and robbed in a low London dive and shanghaied on to another vessel when Sweden lies just ahead; and that leads the murderous menfolk in *The Rope* off the scent of the old man's hoardings even as it causes the little child to discover them and to toss the bright twenty-dollar gold pieces into the sea as if they were so many toys. It is the identical sense of the God-played trick that one feels in *Gold* when Captain Bartlett has lost his mind and ruined his home in the worship of an illusionary treasure that turns out to be brass; that finds the wife of the scientist pregnant in *The First Man* at the very time that she and her husband were to have set out on their most important expedition; and that causes the Princess Kukachin in *Marco Millions* to waste her pure young love on such a callow and grasping Babbitt in ancient dress as Marco.

Ironic though Mr. O'Neill may be in the majority of cases, he does occasionally write with the fine fervor of tragedy. In the last scene of *Beyond the Horizon,* Mr. O'Neill extends his ironic chronicle of the misfortunes of two brothers who take each other's places in life beyond its sordid externals to give a hint of tragic exultation. His poet, Robert, who has been such a misfit on the farm that his life has been a painful ruin, dies happily in the knowledge that it is

by death alone that he can travel beyond the horizons of which he has dreamed. His death is the beginning, not the end. "You mustn't feel sorry for me," he says in a voice suddenly ringing with the happiness of hope. "Don't you see I'm happy at last — free — free! — freed from the farm — free to wander on and on — eternally!" That same feeling of exaltation lifts the pathetic romance of the two consumptives in *The Straw* above the sanatorium details of the earlier acts, to a final scene of agonizing beauty, which flames with a love that death cannot kill and that pain cannot conquer, because it has been born in pain at the moment of death. Equally fervid is the transfiguring frenzy of the concluding scene of *All God's Chillun,* Mr. O'Neill's study of miscegenation, in which the white girl asks her black husband if God will forgive her, and he replies, "Maybe He can forgive what you've done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I've done to you; but I don't see how He's going to forgive — Himself." It is in *Desire Under the Elms* that Mr. O'Neill has most nearly approached the conception of tragedy that was dear to the Greeks. For in *Desire* he is not mastered by his details but is the master of them, even as he is the master of a noble stylization that is as telling as it is finely austere. For once he advances his tragedy in the terms of people who are vibrant with the capacity for great suffering. And by doing so he elevates a tale of wasteful murder, of mean deception, of hideous lust for possession and of gross carnal love far above its sordid trappings and fills a drab New England farmhouse with something of the glory of a Theban palace.

The tragic and ironic forces with which Mr. O'Neill deals, he handles with a power that is uniquely his own. It is a power born of the grim forces which are his subject matter. Like them his writing surges onward because it

must; because it shares with them their quality of inevitability. It has no time for the subduings of a blue pencil skilfully wielded or for the niceties that are so dear to the lesser men and that would do so much to conserve its strength, because it is as wasteful of itself as nature is and seems to be equally casual in its editing. Its force is most resilient when Mr. O'Neill's concern is not the sciences that man must master with his mind but the crude elements of nature that he must battle with his arms, because it is as an emotionalist, and not a thinker, that Mr. O'Neill excels. His strength is of that great, raw, shaggy kind that Whitman's was. It is soberer, starker and infinitely more grim. But it is no less torrential, savage as it is, with the same energy, heavy with the same profusion and cumulative in the same headlong way.

Mr. O'Neill's are vigorous words unloosed in vigorous cadences. Listen to Paddy and to Yank as they compare the virtues of the sea that was to the merits of the sea that is, in the fireman's forecastle of *The Hairy Ape,* and you hear the singing strength of which his speech is possible when it is at its best. "Oh, to be back in the fine days of my youth, ochone!" keens Paddy, "Oh, there was beautiful ships them days — clippers wid tall masts touching the sky — fine strong men in them — men that was sons of the sea as if 'twas the mother that bore them. Oh, the clean skins of them, and the clear eyes, the straight backs and the full chests of them! Brave men they was, and bold men surely! We'd be sailing, out bound down round the Horn maybe. We'd be making sail in the dawn, with a fair breeze, singing a chanty song wid no care to it. And astern the land would be sinking low and dying out, but we'd give it no heed but a laugh, and never a look behind. For the day that was, was enough, for we was free men — and I'm thinking 'tis only slaves do be

giving heed to the day that's gone or the day to come — until they're old like me."

To which Yank replies, "Aw, yuh crazy Mick! (He springs to his feet and advances on Paddy threateningly — then stops, fighting some queer struggle within himself — lets his hands fall to his sides — contemptuously) Aw, take it easy. Yuh're aw right, at dat. Yuh're bugs, dat's all — nutty as a cuckoo. All dat tripe yuh been pullin'— Aw, dat's all right. On'y it's dead, get me? Yuh don't belong no more, see. Yuh don't get de stuff. Yuh're too old. (Disgustedly) But aw say, come up for air onct in a while, can't yuh? See what's happened since yuh croaked. (He suddenly bursts forth vehemently, growing more and more excited.) Say! Sure! Sure! I meant it! What de hell — Say, lemme talk! Hey! Hey, you old Harp! Hey, youse guys! Say, listen to me — wait a moment — I gotter talk, see. I belong and he don't. He's dead but I'm living. Listen to me! Sure I'm part of de engines! Why de hell not! Dey move, don't dey? Dey're speed, ain't dey! Dey smash trou, don't dey? Twenty-five knots a hour! Dat's goin' some! Dat's new stuff! Dat belongs! But him, he's too old. He gets dizzy. Say, listen. All dat crazy tripe about nights and days; all dat crazy tripe about stars and moons; all dat crazy tripe about suns and winds, fresh air and de rest of it — Aw, hell, dat's all a dope dream! Hittin' de pipe of de past, dat's what he's doing. He's old, and don't belong no more. But me, I'm young! I'm in de pink! I move wit it! It, get me! I mean de ting dat's de guts of all dis. It ploughs trou all de tripe he's been sayin'. It blows dat up! It knocks dat dead! It slams dat offen de face of de oith! It, get me! De engines and de coal and de smoke and all de rest of it! He can't breathe and swallow coal dust, but I kin, see? Dat's fresh air for me!"

Set against the speeches of Paddy and Yank, such a speech

as Reuben's psalm to Mother Dynamo, or such a chant as the one in *The Fountain* which aims at making a lyric comment on the theme of the play in such meagre words as:

Love is a flower
Forever blooming,
Beauty a fountain
Forever flowing
Upward into the source of sunshine,
Upward into the azure heaven;
One with God but
Ever returning
To kiss the earth that the flower may live,

and you see the difference between the O'Neill whose words throb with the beat of forces that have possessed him, and the O'Neill who attempts to work consciously as a poet. You become aware, too, of the paradox that Mr. O'Neill so constantly presents of being able to write prose that flames with the fires of poetry, at the same time that he is unable to write poetry that has the virtues of prose.

Of recent years, as Mr. O'Neill has grown as an artist and grown away from immediate contact with his early material, and as his field of exploration has ceased to be the world of fact and become the world of modern psychology and mysticism, an increasing self-consciousness has manifested itself in his work. His thought has often been impeded in its statement because of the "mystical patterns" and "overtones" that, as he himself has described it, lie "dimly behind and beyond the words and actions of the characters." An acute illustration of that confusion and of the involutions of his own mind which he expects an audience to follow in the terms of an elaborate symbolism, is *The Great God Brown,*

where, as Mr. O'Neill explains it, "Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the super-sensitive painter-poet underneath it, but also an integral part of his character as the artist. The world is not only blind to the man beneath, but it also sneers at and condemns the Pan-mask it sees. After that Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Mephistopheles. It is as Mephistopheles he falls stricken at Brown's feet after having condemned Brown to destruction by willing him his mask, but, this mask falling off as he dies, it is the Saint who kisses Brown's feet in abject contrition and pleads as a little boy to a big brother to tell him a prayer."

When *Dynamo* was playing at the Theatre Guild the program carried further indications of Mr. O'Neill's growing self-consciousness as an artist. One bit of evidence was a quotation from one of his letters to the Board of Managers in which he referred to the dialogue of the play as "Interludism"; another was a reprint from an article by Kenneth Macgowan in which Mr. Macgowan mentioned "the Big Grand Opus" Mr. O'Neill was planning, which, in Mr. O'Neill's words, was to be neither a novel nor a play because "there will be many plays in it and it will have a greater scope than any novel I know of. Its form will be altogether its own — a lineal descendant of *Strange Interlude* but beside it 'interlude' will seem like a shallow episode." The third bit of evidence was a letter to George Jean Nathan in which Mr. O'Neill described *Dynamo* as "a symbolical and factual biography of what is happening in a large section of the American (and not only American) soul right now. It is really the first play of a trilogy that will dig at the roots of

the sickness of today as I feel it — the death of an old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply scribbling around on the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer."

Of the fact that Mr. O'Neill has not contented himself with "scribbling around on the surface of things," there can be no question. He, more than any contemporary dramatist, has risen above the status of a parlor entertainer. Finding his way into the theatre by such a hospitable side door as the directors of the Provincetown Playhouse offered, he less than any of our playwrights has made concessions to the theatre as the commercial managers have believed the public wanted it to be. He has gone his own way, caring only for the thing that he has wanted to say and saying it only in the way in which he has happened to want to say it. It is that very integrity of his — that unswerving and uncompromising loyalty to what he has believed to be the best that was in him — which, coupled with the fierce strength of his talents, has made him the most spirited path-finder among present-day dramatists.

From the time of his early sea plays, through the period of his first realistic long plays and such expressionistic dramas as *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape,* to such of his more recent breaks with tradition as *Strange Interlude* and *Lazarus Laughed,* he has shown himself to be a fearless experimenter. Daring to state the grim truth, as he has seen it, in the Cinderelladom of our theatre, he has also dared to state it in any form that he may have desired. With a

courage that is his alone he has made the theatre adapt itself to him and refused to adapt himself to it. Creating the form to fit his needs, instead of fitting his needs into an accepted form, he has defied all the cut-and-dried conventions of the show-shop — discarding realism, employing any number of scenes, using symbols, requiring Constructivist settings, relying on a complicated system of masks, offending against the traditional time limit of performances, and using such forbidden fruits of the pre-realistic theatre as the aside and the soliloquy to bring "the stream of consciousness" into the theatre. He has broken rules, not for the pleasure of breaking them, but because he has bowed to no other dictates than his own desire, and his thirst for freedom of expression.

If in spite of his exceptional courage and his no less exceptional power, Mr. O'Neill seems an unsatisfactory genius it is because he comes so frequently within the range of greatness without achieving it completely. His plays are peaked with greatness rather than sustained by it. They are marred by blemishes from which his taste has not spared them, moments, or whole scenes, that one wishes were other than what they are, because he has not yet learned how to harness his own strength or to be the absolute master of the raw power that is his. But whether he fails or whether he succeeds, the merit of his having tried shines through all that he writes. And it is both the strength and the daring of his attempts which elevate him above all of his American contemporaries, making him seem as Smithers said of the Emperor Jones, " 'E's a better man than the lot o' you put together." Like his own emperor, however, Mr. O'Neill has reason to be afraid of silver. Not of bullets, to be sure, but of the silvery thoughts and phrases for which he has shown a growing fondness of late and which may yet be the cause of his undoing.

2

The Actor's Plight

"WHAT, Sir, a fellow who claps a hump on his back, and a lump on his leg, and cries: *'I am Richard the Third'?"* It was, of course, Dr. Johnson who said it, and Boswell who heard it and rushed home to write it down, Dr. Johnson grown especially splenetic because poor Bozzie had dared to side with Richardson in holding that a player should be treated with respect — a player who, in the good Doctor's own words, "only recites."

But the humped and lumped Richard of Johnson's phrase is no longer the actor of the modern theatre. Indeed, so much has acting altered since the days of Cibber and Garrick that it is problematical whether or not those preëminent "reciters" of Johnson's time would recognize the majority of the men and women who stand behind contemporary footlights as actors at all. To Garrick's ears, attuned as they were to the sonorous pounding of blank verse, the politely modulated voices of the present breed would seem strangely insufficient. His eyes would find but little that was familiar in the decorous control that governs the modern player's use of his body.

What, he would wonder, is the matter with this man? Is

he paralyzed that he never lifts his arms to make a full-rounded, magnificent, operatic gesture? Poor soul, does he never ache to put down that cigarette holder and clasp a sword, or to take his hands off that chair or out of his pockets and raise them to heaven in a curse which terrifies all who hear it? His voice, can he hold it down to all this chitter-chatter of the drawing-room, when there is verse to speak? Has he no knees? He never seems to use them. And no legs? Apparently he never shows them, except that segment of them that over-hanging golf-trousers display. His plumes, his palaces, and all the regalia of his trade, can it be that he is content to do without them? And substitute that Derby, that drawing-room so like his mother's, and that suit he might have worn on his way to the theatre? What is the matter with him that he claps no hump on his back, and no longer revels in being Richard the Third instead of himself?

And Davy would be right. Because the simplest of all simple facts is that the modern actor has, for the most part, ceased to belong to the line of Garrick and Siddons, Booth and Cushman, and even Irving and Terry. He is no longer the man from a world apart, a mournful, seedy-looking fellow, a mildewed Webster, who could be spotted as an actor a mile off and who gloried in all the eccentricities that were the badge of "the Profession." His throat, which once was ribbed with veins that stood out like trade-marks of his art as it bulged above a flowing tie and an open collar, slips today into an Arrow Collar, fitted to the size of any man, because this modern actor — both on the stage and off — has taken as his ideal the desire to look, be and act as much like everyone else as he humanly can. He has put his vagabondage behind him, turned conformist instead of outcast,

wedged his way into society, and emerged not as an actor but as a gentleman.

His world is no longer the isolated, half-mad but self-sufficient world of the Crummles family. He now has his tea at the Ritz, his dinner at the Ambassador, and his apartment on Park Avenue. He is dressed like any stock broker, and runs to no grandiose type but takes the fashions of the fashionable world as his model. He lives not so much for the theatre as by it, and in the rounds of that life which is his he emerges most often as a debonair man-about-town. In America, where New York is the goal of every actor, the players who have "arrived" come to be such dyed-in-the-wool men-about-town that most of them never leave Manhattan. They have their apartments, their friends, their favorite restaurants and their clubs. Little wonder, therefore, that trouping and the rigors of the road have lost their glamor for them. To them the road is only an annoying inconvenience which takes them away from the ease, the comfortable routine of their daily lives, to say nothing of the attention of the critics, the dramatic editors, the managers and the theatre-going public in New York. Many of them refuse to sign "run of the play" contracts, so fearful are they — not of the long run or of what it may do to them — of ceasing to be men and women about town.

The actor is by no means solely responsible for the change that has overtaken his profession. He is, to a large extent, the victim of circumstance. If he has ceased to be a "reciter," a vagabond, a rogue or a trouper, it is largely because he has been born into a theatre which has resolutely turned its back on the traditions of the old days. He is but a cog — and a more or less haphazard cog at that — in the machinery of modern realism. In the face of what the managers thought the public wanted, or what playwrights have desired to

write and elected as dramatic material, he has had no other choice than to become what he is. The gods of the moment have inevitably become his, because he has been wise enough to realize that the nearer he comes to being "untheatrical" (in the old sense of the word) the closer he approaches the ideals of naturalism and the greater are his chances of success.

It would be absurd and even inhuman to expect him to be above courting favor. But the results of his following the mode of the last twenty years are, it must be admitted, without precedent in theatre history. Where once the actor was ill at ease if he had to play without all the paraphernalia of the wardrobe mistress, your modern actor is often frankly embarrassed if he has to put on any clothes but those which might hang in his own closet. In the same way, because the traditions of the theatre of which he is a part have taught him to despise the "reciter," his discomfort is so keen when he is asked to speak verse, or any speech but that which he might hear outside the theatre, that he immediately sets about to reduce it to the rhythms of the everyday, and does his best to muffle verse into prose.

The reason for this is that the modern actor, due to no fault of his own, has been asked incessantly — not to play himself as the greatest actors have always done — but to be himself in public. And the difference between the two is enormous. He has been imbedded in a theatre which seldom deserts the backgrounds of modern life. And in that theatre he has been valued much more as a charming or decided personality, than as an actor who is able to create and project character. This constant stressing of himself, and of his own personal mannerisms, has frequently meant that young men and women are drafted into major rôles with little or no technical knowledge of the tools of their trade. If they suc-

ceed, early in their careers, in winning attention by establishing their private personalities as desirable public personalities, their chances of growth are almost negligible. They become known for their special qualifications which are either engraved on the memories of the managers or written down on the cards of the casting offices. So-and-So is a blonde, five feet three inches tall, and good for such-and-such. Another is a dark man, nearly six feet tall, with a personality that admirably equips him to be a villain. And these young persons are thereupon sentenced for life (that is the short span of their theatrical lives) not only to be themselves but to continue to be themselves as the managers have seen them when they first won public favor. They are not even encouraged to grow as individuals, because they must surrender their lives to the stencil of their success.

The particular way in which this method of treating actors affects the theatre is that it puts a ban on apprenticeship, on those arduous early days that most of the older actors were forced to endure and survive in order to learn the rudiments of their craft. It leaves the young players more or less destitute of technical resources, of any training in the repertory of the past, with its special demands, any knowledge of verse and the romantic theatre, and any sense of an apostolic succession in the line of great acting. No matter how diligent or gifted they may be, these younger actors and actresses of today, they are not given more than a tenth of the acting opportunities that the players of fifty years ago enjoyed. In the first place, they find most managerial doors tightly closed on inexperience. The managers are so aware of the necessity of employing seasoned or experienced actors, who have proven they could be themselves in public, that they make it all but impossible for the newcomer to begin. In the second place, if the novices do contrive to be successful,

they are committed to the indolent, stagnating bondage of the long run, and kept idle for several years — that is idle in the sense of self-advancement — by being forced to reappear each night in a part which has exhausted its possibilities of growth within the first few months of the run.

In the third place, by having been invited to pattern themselves on the ladies and gentlemen of a drawing-room, they are taught to value all the understatement and repression which supposedly belongs to polite society, but which is completely alien to an actor as a sensitive instrument for eloquent emotional release. And, by being anchored to a metropolitan center, such as New York, they have gradually come to deny themselves those contacts with the fresher spirits of the back countries which, since the days of Molière, have widened the scope of the actor's trade and brought him into a surer control of himself and his means before all kinds of audiences and under all kinds of conditions.

To escape the tyranny of type casting and the long run, and to gain a needed versatility, the luckier and more ambitious of the younger actors have had recourse to summer stock companies or resident theatres in the smaller cities, and, with such directors as Stuart Walker and Jessie Bonstelle, they have had the chance so few of their contemporaries have had, of serving the apprenticeship needed in every art. More than that, in these stock companies, or in such theatres as the Guild or the Civic Repertory, they have been able, as every artist must, to experiment with themselves and undertake those very parts which may, at first glance, seem most foreign to their abilities. Where every other artist speaks to the world through a medium that is an indirect expression of himself, the actor must always speak directly. Where the violinist has his instrument, the sculptor his marble, the painter his canvas, as external means of self-

expression, the actor has only himself, his own body and voice, upon which to register his reactions and create his impressions. His need for pliancy, for a constant and sure control of his every muscle, is, therefore, doubly great, unless he is to wither and die even as a master of himself.

If the younger actor has found that *The Book of Etiquette* has stood him in better stead than a thorough knowledge of the works of William Shakespeare, he must be praised for his practicality rather than damned for his ignorance. He has come into a strangely baffling theatre, in which on the one hand he has heard the designer and the director loudly clamoring for their rights, and, on the other, he has seen his old friend the playwright more or less holding back from the ranks of the insurgents. Perplexed by what was happening, the actor has cast his lot with the playwright. After all he had worked with the playwright for centuries. And often in the past the playwright had served him well by writing especially at his command those great, passion-tearing rôles that he had loved to act, and that generations of his kind had learned to look upon as splendid means of self-testing as well as self-exhibition.

But the actor had not known this man. This modern playwright was no subservient hack, who was contented to give Macready big words for bigger scenes. He was a thoroughly self-assured young man who knew that the world valued Ibsen and Chekov and Shaw, not because of the actors who had appeared in their plays, but because of what they had to say — even because of what they had had to say quite without regard for the theatre. He knew that William Archer and a host of others had been on the playwright's side in giving the dramatist a preëminent position. And the young playwright, suddenly seeing his trade as authorship instead of fitting gloves to an actor's person-

ality, became as relentless as the designer and the director in maintaining his own importance. Furthermore he became a realist, who had a passion for observing the surface details of life, and who dedicated himself to ousting the fustian of the old theatre in order to clear the way for the comment he had to make on contemporary life. In addition to turning realist, he emerged as an intellectual, and began to command a public for his own opinions and theories.

Naturally what he had to say became more important to him than what he had given a particular actor to say. Naturally, too, he began to think of his play as an entity, instead of building it around a major rôle. To him his characters seemed people, not parts. Nor did they emerge as parts until he consulted with his manager on the problem of finding actors who happened to be their duplicates in life.

It was the playwright, too, who sat with the manager and the director in judgment on the line of hungry aspirants that filled the manager's out office, and said, "Oh, no! Never! He's much too tall for Jim. Heavens, no! She's not Clara's type at all." The playwright's courage became so great, to say nothing of his authority and less of his bad manners, that he dared to speak his opinions out loud, in the very face of the actor or actress who happened to be unfortunate enough not to have been born like his Jim and his Clara. He phrased these opinions in the coldly appraising terms which only managers and authors can use towards actors, or that horse fanciers employ when feeling the fetlocks of an animal they consider buying. Even if Miss Flippup, who was a lovely leading lady, got the author's permission to play the part of the disagreeable and unsympathetic (that is a vastly significant word in the theatre) adventuress in the second act — because she wanted to try her wings at some-

thing else — her manager would put his foot down firmly and say, "Not on your life. Your public will never stand for that. They don't know you like that. Come now, be reasonable, and think of your future." His reasoning was, of course, that as "they" did not know her like that, they would have no curiosity in seeing her try to be like that, and would, in fact, never stand for her like that under any circumstances.

The modern actor has, in a sense, found himself betrayed even by the playwright, denied "rôles" in the full meaning that good old word once had and forced to submit to whatever the winds of good or bad fortune might chance to bring him. As his opportunity usually has come from being himself, instead of someone else, there is little wonder that, in the parlors, kitchens and crime dens of the contemporary stage, the actor has abandoned many of the facets of his art which would have once been necessary to him. He has ignored fencing, dancing, and the training of his body because in the polite or impolite but humdrum theatre of which he is a part he is seldom required to use them. Diction and elocution, too, he has thrown overboard as supercargo from a silly past, settling down assiduously to what, for lack of a better phrase, may be known as the transom school of acting. By that I mean that the modern actor, in order to achieve his naturalistic effects, has largely confined his acting zone to his face. He has kept his body carefully closed to the expressive freedom he might have drawn from it, and let the light of his understanding, his emotion, his pain and comedy, pour only through that limited area of his body that is safely above his Adam's apple. In other words, he has shut the door but left the light on in the transom.

The theatre manager must take an even greater share

of the blame for the fate of the contemporary player than the dramatist; the manager, because he has been so intent upon making a business of the theatre that he has forgotten what his only real business in the theatre is. He has been so preoccupied as a realtor, an investor or what you will, that he has had little time to look a season ahead, or to consider to what barren goal his methods were ultimately leading him. His expenses have risen at such an alarming rate, and his budget has become so swollen and his margin of profit so precarious, that he has decided, as a person whose concern with the theatre is often only as a means of making a quick turn-over, that it was wiser to fight for immediate results rather than to wait upon an uncertain future.

Accordingly, he has forgotten about the actor as an artist and put him on the level of a cook, or any other hired help that can be called in at a moment's notice from the nearest Employment Agency. Like a modern housekeeper, when he wants service of a particular kind, he does not expect to have to do anything towards training it. He wants an actor who is a good sheriff, an amusing college type, a club man, or a thug, just as the housekeeper wants a cook or a laundress or an extra waiter, and when his sheriff, his college boy and his club man come into his office he expects them to be at least as near to their announced types as most cooks, laundresses and waiters are to their vaunted professions. Of course, they must be broken into his particular household, taught where the linen and silver are kept, and even trained to adjust themselves to his personal idiosyncrasies. That is only natural. But when he is through with them — at the conclusion of the run of a certain play — he gives them notice, and that is all there is to it.

He has engaged them for one thing and one thing only, and when they have done it and he has drained them of

their little bit, he may never call upon them again. Certainly he is not expected to have them on his mind, or to feel in any way responsible for what they may do next, or to lose any sleep or money over the problem of their futures and their opportunities for growth. That is their concern, not his. He has paid them regularly, featured or starred them according to contract, and treated them like the expert jobbers that they are. And our whole theatre recognizes the transaction as fair and equitable, and accepts it without a murmur.

During the last twenty or thirty years there have been any number of theorists and critics who have seen the evil of this jobber method and protested against it by harking back to the virtues of repertory and the dangers of the long-run. Many dark oysters and darker filet mignons have been eaten at public dinners on the subject. But the answer that so many of the managers have given to the theorists' plea has shown the way in which their minds have worked.

"Repertory?" they have laughed. "We have no need of it in New York. The seventy or eighty playhouses on Manhattan provide each night the greatest repertory that the world has known. What more do you want?" Their answer has been more than right when considered from their own point of view or from the point of view of the casual ticket buyer. But it has been as silly as it is ultimately specious when judged in the light of the theatre itself. For it is based on the fallacious assumption that the people who come to the theatre can be considered without first considering the people who make it. The surest way of failing to give the public what it wants is to consider the public so slavishly that you have no time left in which to consider what it is given. In this sport of catering to the unpredictable tastes of an unpredictable public, it has been the actor who has been

fair game. Though his business is protected by an excellent organization, his talents have been protected by no game laws.

If the lot of the contemporary player is entirely different from that of the "reciter" of Dr. Johnson's day, or even of the time of Booth and Barrett, it must not be supposed that he is a fellow who is gloomily to be pitied in one of those comparisons that have a fatal habit of making the past more glorious than the present for no other reason than that the past is safely past and therefore beyond recall. The older actor undoubtedly had merits that cannot be found in the younger players of today. He had presence and a fine capacity for making verse sing with the full glory of song even when he was giving it the implication of its dramatic content. He was a towering, virtuoso figure, but he was by no means faultless. He was as much the echo of the tastes and manners of his time as our contemporary players are, and as subject as they are to its restrictions.

In spite of his love of the theatre he saw it wholly in terms of himself and was encouraged on all sides to do so. The result was that he was an exhibitionist of the first rank, who knew every trick of the trade by which he could blot the rest of his company from the minds of his audience. He was — and this is a tribute to his personal magic — able to make them endure with satisfaction many evenings of unhappy and drivelling bombast because of the sheer beauty of his voice and the dynamic theatricalism of his personality. Even when he essayed the greatest plays he had a way of breaking their backs as plays and converting them into show-case vehicles for his own fiery gifts. He was part of a "quick study" theatre in which the exigencies of a large repertory must often have resulted in a general shoddiness of production which would not be tolerated today. He had

his wickedly obvious and hollow tricks which were forced upon him by his lack of time for independent, self-searching study; tricks in inflection and posture that were more tawdry than the flapping canvas behind him; devices which today have been relegated largely to the most despised of stock companies.

If the older actor had his faults as well as his virtues, it must be whole-heartedly — though tardily — admitted that the contemporary player has his virtues as well as his faults. He has weeded out much that was absurd and intolerable in the old manner, simplifying, clarifying and patiently perfecting the devices within his needs. He cannot be condemned for a change in mode for which he is not responsible. If he is not a romantic actor, neither is his a romantic age. He, too, has felt the pulse of this photographic present. And within the narrow limits of his opportunities he has attained a patient, painstaking habit of observance, and a naturalness that are near perfection.

Playing the pianissimo of daily pettiness he has managed to bring his parlor self on to the stage with a fine restraint and, not infrequently, an extraordinary simplicity. More than that, within the type he has been allotted, he has developed an expertness in reproducing on the stage the pertinent inconsequentials which are so irrelevant in romanticism and so necessary to realism, that is comparable only to the best work of the best realistic dramatists in its penetration and photography. In general, too, he has contrived to convert the slower methods of preparation and the longer periods of playing one part, which are so characteristic of the contemporary theatre, to his advantage and to the decided advantage of the play. Discontented with the patently superficial, and taught to distrust as well as avoid the "ham" labor-saving devices of the smaller stock companies, he has

shown a thoroughness, even a depth, that occasionally raises his work to the plane of true creation.

There is no reason to question the competence of the present generation of American actors, or the high talents of some of its leaders. Though as a generation it may have produced no great actors and overshadowing personalities, the ranks are none the less filled with able craftsmen, fuller in truth than the trade can stand. There are actors of all kinds, with their dimensions and qualifications written down on those little cards in the casting offices. Tea-cup comedians, gas-jet tragedians, heroes, heroines, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, rich men, poor men, beggarmen, thieves — all crowding for recognition. Not "reciters." No, nor Richards in the sense of Garrick's theatre, nor even actors as Garrick would have used the word. But men and women who are ready and waiting to go on nevertheless. But waiting, perhaps even more than they know, for the theatre to go on first.

Mrs. Fiske

Writing of Mrs. Fiske, Alexander Woollcott once spoke with a charming felicity of "the nudge of her comedy." And nudge it is that she lends to her lines, because she has a highly individual manner not only of elbowing her own way through them and jostling them to their point, but also of sending them scurrying across the footlights — awakened and ready to nudge us. She startles them into provocation, meaning and nuance, above all into comedy. She startles them because she never allows them to startle her, as is the sad habit of so many of the lesser actresses, particularly the younger comediennes.

She knows in practise, as almost every one knows in theory, that comedy is the child of planning, not of accident. Its coming must be prepared for, its destination known in advance. Accordingly she is not willing to centre her interest in the single line she may be speaking. Instead she gives it sequence, makes it part of a continuity, reflecting what went before even as it looks forward to what follows. She may seem to have stumbled upon it in her speech. It may slip lightly, madly from her tongue, sent flying in a torrent of other sentences. But her eyes, the tilt of her head, her smile are constant signals to warn us that she has not permitted it to overtake her. Her thoughts are ever scanning the background against which she has placed it, or racing ahead to what is in the foreground of her mind. As a result

the line of comedy she utters is rich with a triple value, and subject to a triple exposure.

Moreover, it is she who is in command of it, in command, too, of the stage on which she enters and the audience she faces. When Mrs. Fiske appears at that door at the back centre, she takes immediate charge of the situation. She fairly whips us into attention. The play, which up until that time may have suffered an alarming list, suddenly rights itself. With the first impetuous booming of her voice, and that initial glance she gives her fellow actors through her lorgnette, we sense that an authentic captain is on the bridge. Her speech with which she peppers us like a machine gun and the sudden tossings of her head might be mistaken in any one else as signals of uncertainty. So, too, might her brisk crossings of the stage, with her upturned chin pointing jerkily from side to side, her incessant talking as she moves, and the furious rapping of her right hand against a letter carried in her left — a letter incidentally which she scarcely glances at to read.

In her case, however, these habits are but emphatic betrayals of authority, releases for a nervous vitality which bullies the play, the cast and us into a quick submission. They are only the means of her comedy, her method of keeping it moving, of nudging it into a tireless alertness. They are mannerisms, if you will, like the handkerchief she flutters in her hands, her toying with her lorgnette, or her habit of seizing upon a line, shattering it into segments and repeating its parts at such a break-neck speed that she has managed to say it twice in the time it would have taken an ordinary actor to say it once. Naturally these are mannerisms, but, as their results indicate, they spring from no uncertainty. Instead they are the well-considered devices by which she projects comedy, and conquers it as well.

Mrs. Fiske's conquest is no passive victory. It admits neither truces nor respites, and knows no mercy. The offensive she wages, however, is not the laborious product of a regulation chief of staff. She has, of course, an army of some kind under her command. But, unlike most generals, she keeps her army in the rear, whether she orders it there or not, and advances single-handed into combat. It is not selfishness, nor a wilful blindness to the strength of a unified front, which makes her snatch the decorations from the hands of her major-generals and her sergeants. It is her whole training for the theatre, and her sensing of its values. This Mrs. Fiske we see today as Mistress Ford, Mrs. Alving, Miss Nelly of New Orleans, Mrs. Hardcastle or Mrs. Bumpstead-Leigh was not a child actress at the age of three for nothing. Nor has her rich and varied theatre life stood her in no stead.

Remember that at four she was making her New York début at the old Theatre Français on Fourteenth Street in *A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing* in a cast headed by Carlotta Leclercq, and that, only a few years later, she was playing Prince Arthur in a revival of *King John* at Booth's Theatre. Remember, too, that in her childhood she touched most of the good old sawdust dramas of yesteryear. She was Paul in *The Octoroon,* little Mary Morgan in *Ten Nights in a Barroom,* Louise in *The Two Orphans,* the Widow Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons,* Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Lucy Fairweather in *The Streets of New York,* and played the double rôles of the Gamin and Peachblossom in *Under the Gaslight.* Remember, as Mr. Woollcott tells us in his *Mrs. Fiske,* that "she basked in the radiance of Mary Anderson, and steadied herself amid the thunder of John McCullough, and dropped off to sleep to the crooning music of J. K. Emmet." Remember that long before she was known

to the world as Mrs. Fiske and began to play Hardy's Tess and Ibsen, Becky Sharp, Magda, Hannele and Nell Sanders in *Salvation Nell,* she was a star, in such dramas as *Mila, Queen of Natchez* and *Juanita,* known quite simply then as Minnie Maddern.

It is little wonder, therefore, that when Mrs. Fiske enters she pounces upon a comedy with a veteran's authority, or that, after her entrance, she is mistress of a thousand tricks to send it spinning to its laughs. Perhaps, there is even less cause for wonder in the way in which she tyrannizes it in no time, throwing the picture out of focus as a picture of life, but providing in its place a kind of super-actor's theatre, where one waits and watches not for what the play may do to her as a single character, but for what she will do to the entire play as an actress. She makes her control evident by the pace she sets, a galloping, mad-cap, exhilarating pace of her own. And she is mistress of that pace whether she happens to be speaking or listening, because at no time does she rest in her work, and at no time is she still or idle. She listens perceptibly, audibly, urging the actor on, making him look at her, and forcing us to do the same even when he is speaking, pushing the play ahead by little grunts and snorts which build up an excited air of anticipation even while they are constant reminders of her control, her indefatigable dominance.

She is, of course, no realist, held down to the polite diminuendos of the drawing-room or daily life. Nor is she an impersonator, a character actress. Like most of the actresses of our time, she is herself in each new part. But where she differs from them is that she is not content to stop there. Instead she projects herself, her own vital and zestful personality, into vibrant theatre terms, to just the same extent that she subjects the play to her own personality

and methods. In her comedy, she does not always confine herself to a nudge. Occasionally, she jabs it home, or fairly clubs us with it. But at all times she does enlarge it, give it life and value, and insure its coming-off. She confesses mischievously that what she is up to is make-believe and glories in its artifice, stating it all the while in the most militant terms of her own medium — and herself.

Otis Skinner

THE play is *The Honor of the Family,* the scene the Booth Theatre, the date, December 25, 1926. It is the third time Otis Skinner has appeared in this dramatization of Balzac's *La Rabouilleuse,* and the second time he has dug into his trunk to revive it. Twenty years have passed since the curtain first rang upon it in New Rochelle, twenty years and Mr. Skinner is an older man and the play — as is the way of things — a much, much older play. The middle of the first act has already slipped by. Now the curtain seems imminent, and nothing has happened to catch the eye or rivet the attention. The scenery is a little shoddy, but not nearly as much so as the writing. And the cast is none too good. Though the actors are dressed in the costumes of 1824, they do not wear them, but are merely covered by them. In fact, both the play and the performance are wooden and incredible — as dead as the de Mauprat subplot in *Richelieu* and of just about the same vintage. Who cares whether that plotting couple on stage will make away with the old French miser's money? It all seems too silly, too archaic, too dull — and anyway this is Christmas.

But at just the moment when you may be reaching for your hat, or suppressing a yawn that makes your eardrums ache, things begin to happen. A man swaggers past the window at the back. Yes, that is all, but it is enough to make you swallow your yawn and forget you ever had a hat. Enough because — and we are forced to feel it — the

brief passing of that man is more than obedience to a stage direction. The distance he has covered may be only a simple six feet or so. But there is no tape that can measure his crossing, because it is not a matter of distance but of the creation of character. With that brief appearance at the window blood has suddenly been pumped through the anæmic veins of this old melodrama, not mere mortal blood, of course, but the blood that is red with the redder corpuscles of the theatre. Not only has a character been summarized in a passing glance, but he has been catapulted across the footlights to all of us from the remotest depths of the backstage, from that very position in fact at which most of the younger actors, who like to hug the footlights, are ill at ease, but at which the veterans feel triumphantly secure.

If at that moment you suddenly find yourself sitting upright, without knowing or caring what has become of your programme; if Christmas has fled your mind without your dismissing it, it is because of the brave, salty figure of swash-buckling romance this man cuts as he swaggers by the window. From the battered high-hat sitting cockily aslant his head, and the greatcoat tightly bundled around his body, to the cane he swings with the air of a major-domo, this stout Ratapoil seems the most blustering of benevolent villains. In no time he is past the window, and has stomped his way on to the stage, confronting that heartless couple which is conspiring for old Rouget's money. Now we can see him better — note those slightly moth-eaten eyebrows, follow the ends of his moustache as they mount skyward, observe his bulging red cheeks, and that nose which seems a tattered poppy in their midst. We can follow, too, the energetic manner in which this Colonel Bridau

swings up and down the stage, and enjoy that walk of his which is the finest bluster in roosterdom.

In a twinkling our cares are gone. We no longer think about the rent-day worries. We have even forgotten the half hour or more of dullness through which we have sat. In a twinkling, too, it seems to us that the old miser is really being cheated, and his being cheated begins to matter. We know no one like this jolly rascal who has come to Rouget's defense ever trod the earth. But we do not mind that, except to regret it. This is the way in which all villains should be treated. This Bridau's swagger is the swagger all of us have hidden in our hearts, a hang-over from childhood, when within ourselves we were still brave non-conformists, when each of us rebelled at good behavior and, hating the respectable gentry of Nottinghamshire, gave our affections to Robin Hood and all the other lovable bandits who had stout cudgels in their hands. "Bang" goes Bridau's cane, thumping down on the table like the crack of doom — and we chortle with delight. Out comes his warning to the conspirators — an absurd, preposterous warning if you like, but you do not stop to say so then. Up comes a cigar to his mouth, driven home so grandly that it seems the finest gesture of arrogance this small world knows. And, with a final jaunty pat on the top of his high-hat, calculated to set it at an even cockier angle on the side of his head, off stalks this Bridau for a stroll.

It has taken but a minute, "less than a minute" Otis Skinner assures us in *Footlights and Spotlights,* but it lasts a lifetime in the memory of those who have seen it. By its memorability and the sense of importance it conveys while it is happening, this short second of Philippe Bridau offers an excellent illustration of the difference between coming on to a stage and making an entrance. Any mortal with

feet, crutches, a wheel chair or a nurse can come on to the stage. And almost anyone can — and many modern actors do — slink from a door and slip into the nearest chair with a desperate sense of thankfulness. But locomotion followed by a squat is not an entrance. An entrance is made of entirely different stuff. It is the first "point" an actor scores, a dramatic moment in itself — studied, built up and sustained — which usually rumbles in the wings long before it bursts into view but which, when once made, defies any eye to leave it. Call it a kind of pillage, a hold-up staged in public, if you will. Admit the silliness to which some of the older actors have pushed it in their vanity. Laugh at the way in which some of them loved to swoop down on a play, and tuck it and its cast into their vest pockets, even while they were bludgeoning the audience. But realize that life is not its model, nor etiquette its guide. It is a trick, of course, but therein lies its special glory when it comes off. It is the theatre of the actor at its most militant, but to succeed—as this entrance of Bridau succeeds — it demands an actor behind it, no ordinary actor, but a personality and a technician who is able to carry it through.

Otis Skinner not only carries the entrance of this Bridau through with a triumphant flourish, but, even while he is making it, or whipping the rest of the old melodrama into life, we are carried beyond realism into that theatre of not so long ago, which modern realism has all but extinguished. Watch him in *The Honor of the Family,* see him in *Kismet, Blood and Sand, The Merry Wives, Henry IV* or in the Quinteros' gentle comedy, *100 Years Old,* and you are aware that you are facing a method which is not common on our contemporary stage. It is a veteran's method, sure in its devices, conscious of its "points" and certain in making them — at a time at which "points" are more or

less looked down on by the moderns. It is character acting enlarged beyond the ordinary; bold, romantic, mellow but high-tensioned. It admits no moments of loafing and is never more active than when some one else is speaking. Like Mrs. Fiske, Mr. Skinner listens with his whole body, toys with his handkerchief, and "ahs" and "ums" his way through the speeches he must hear. And like Mrs. Fiske he is one of the most authoritative of our older actors, schooled in a different school, born of a different tradition.

Behind him lies more than a half century of the richest and most varied experience our stage has known. Read his *Footlights and Spotlights* — the wisest and most illuminating of our actors' autobiographies since Joseph Jefferson wrote his — and you will see what is the background for his authority. Here is a man, the son of a Universalist minister, who was given his first letter of introduction to managers by no less a person than the great P. T. Barnum himself. It was in 1877 that he made his first professional debut as an old negro in a play called *Woodleigh* at the Philadelphia Museum. "There was no part I did not play," he tells us, writing of that first year at the Museum when, counting "doubles," he appeared in ninety-two parts between October and June. "Even sex was no bar, for I was sometimes clapped into skirts for nigger wenches and coarse old hags. I scowled as villains, stormed as heavy fathers, dashed about in light comedy, squirmed in character parts, grimaced in the comics, and tottered as the Pantaloon in the pantomime." That was the beginning, and it was the kind of initiation which no modern player is granted. In the years that followed he acted with Lotta Crabtree, with John McCullough, Edwin Booth, Mary Anderson, Madame Janauschek, Lawrence Barrett; barnstormed Leadville when it was "wide open"; was a member of Augustin Daly's famous

company with Mrs. Gilbert, May Irwin, John Drew and Ada Rehan; played Henry VIII to Modjeska's Katharine, Orlando to her Rosalind, Shylock to her Portia, Macbeth to her Lady; was Petruchio to Ada Rehan's Katharine; had his fling at "the inevitable Hamlet"; tried his own hand at management — and all this before the later-day Otis Skinner emerged, the Otis Skinner that Charles Frohman presented, the Otis Skinner of the *Count de Grammont, The Harvester, The Duel, Kismet, Mister Antonio* and *The Honor of the Family.*

When he plays his swaggering villains, his Bridaus and his Kismets, or even when he is seen as the old gentleman whose birthday is the plot of the Quinteros' *100 Years Old,* the background of that experience shows through the acting of this man who "never did like Kings," and who is at his best as rogues. See his fine Falstaff, watch that "valiant Jack" he acted in the Players' Revival of *Henry IV* rather than that far less glorious comico that Shakespeare put into *The Merry Wives,* and you understand just what "the great tradition" can mean in poise, in manner and authority. You understand, too, how Mr. Skinner has domesticated it, house-broken it to modern needs. Above all the "stars" of the Players' Revival, and the unwieldy chronicle-history they made of the play, rose the Falstaff of Mr. Skinner, dominating the entire stage and giving the only life the revival possessed to his scenes at the Boar's Head Tavern. He was not awed by Shakespeare, nor embarrassed because he had to don a costume other than his business suit. Nor was he the slave to hoary convention. He went his own way when he wanted, but always with the surety of one who knows the past before breaking with it.

It was a delight to see an actor unafraid to tackle the comic passages in Shakespeare, and able to keep them comic.

His Sir John was no mere funny fat fellow, depending upon his padding for his laughs. He was a rotund old devil of the taverns; self-indulgent and gluttonous, and yet possessed of an alchemy of pathos that made him lovable beyond his faults. He was sensed as character, appraised in the terms of his theatre values, his "points," and, like Mr. Skinner's Bridau, catapulted across the footlights. He showed the unction of this veteran, his glowing vitality, and betrayed, too, that, though he had scrapped the fustian of "the old tradition," he had — luckily for all of us — salvaged its authority.

Walter Hampden

It is some years now since Walter Hampden first stepped upon the stage of the Plymouth Theatre in the inky trappings of a legendary Prince of Denmark. He was doing what all actors — serious and comic and often without regard for sex — are supposed to have hidden in their hearts as an ambition. He was stealing away from modernity — in his case a Clare Kummer comedy at the theatre next door — and playing Hamlet. It was only for a series of morning matinees to be sure, but it was Hamlet, Shakespeare's Hamlet nevertheless.

Mr. Hampden, it must be admitted, had had a previous hearing in the part. But that was in England, the England of the Benson company in which he had served his novitiate, of the Adelphi Theatre at which he had been engaged, and of the meteoric Laurence Irving, whom he had followed in the rôle. Now he was to play Hamlet in America — the America of Harvard University where he had spent a year, of the Brooklyn Polytechnic at which he had received his A.B; the America in which Mr. Hampden had already made his name, but not his present reputation, for his share in Nazimova's early performances of Ibsen, his association with *The Yellow Jacket, Salome,* and *The Wayfarer,* but most especially for the sanctity of his Manson, the drain man, in Charles Rann Kennedy's super-sanctimonious *The Servant in the House.*

His prince reached Elsinore at a moment that was happy both for himself — and Elsinore. His coming was, in fact,

something of a *coup d'état.* Overnight it stole the reins of government from its predecessors, establishing not only the present dynasty of Walter Hampden in his realm of Shakespeare and the classics, but saving, too — for the time being — the fate, or, at least, the glamor, of Denmark's throne. When Mr. Hampden's Hamlet ran up his colors, the Danish court was a peculiarly dull place, a sort of workhouse ward for fallen monarchs. Into its peaceful midst had come no John Barrymore to threaten the old traditions or bring to them the fire of youth and genius. No one had dreamed of Basil Sidney's turning that sedate court topsy-turvy by dressing it in mufti.

It was a quiet, autumnal realm, undisturbed by discord, that lived in a happy, though remote past. Rivalry it did not know except that mild but respectable rivalry that may perhaps exist in the wearied survival of graying men whose school days were long behind them. Even here it was not for the throne they fought, but against nature. This blood royal that was held up before the public eye may have been purple but it was cold. Among the native claimants were E. H. Sothern, subjecting Elsinore to a stodgy, stolid, prose version of the prince and creating anything but an indecisive Hamlet, and Robert B. Mantell who ranted him out as a kind of bull-necked Polonius in quest of his youth. Of course, there was an occasional visit from the older monarchs of another court to add a little excitement to the married life of Gertrude and Claudius. There was F. R. Benson who brought his world-wearied but clear-thinking prince to the provinces. And the ghost of Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet still stalked the ramparts — poetic, beautiful, but sagging under the cares of office and of being Forbes-Robertson. Elsinore was dead, deader than Marley, dead in everything

except its living death, because a race of Gladstones was trying to be the Prince of Wales.

It was such a court that Mr. Hampden stormed. The Hamlet he offered at those early morning performances in 1918 was certainly no stripling. But neither was he tired. What he may have lacked in physical vitality or in the illusion of having recently come from Wittenberg, he more than made up for in intellectual insight. He played the prince according to tradition, but he did much to ease the tradition of its fustian. He seemed simplicity itself, yet managed to catch both the poet and the philosopher in Hamlet. He brought this prince a melancholy that blinded neither his irony nor his wit, and a mind that understood not only his dilemma but the language of its expression. His diction and his phrasing were clear and clarifying. There was something cold about him even then, something sanctimonious, too. But that very coldness — and that air of sanctity, were cleansing virtues after the sound and fury of the graying veterans.

Though his Hamlet had no inspirational moments, it was consistently intelligent. Above all it maintained a level of high-minded, devoted competence that, when judged by the obvious and ranting princes against which it competed, seemed a plateau of talent. Compared to Mantell's prince it was the work of Garrick; measured by Sothern's it was at least as good as Sothern's Malvolia when pitted against his Hamlet, and it seemed better. Accordingly, with much justification, hats were thrown into the air and there was much "dancing in the street." Some of the newspapers, having no way of guessing what the next few years were to hold, were glad to pronounce it, "The Hamlet of this generation." And the Hampden myth was started.

Now, some ten years later, there is — or there was until

recently—a Hampden Theatre in New York, and Mr. Hampden, as one of the few actor-managers left of the older school, fills the place of educational producer once filled by Sothern and Marlowe, though his organization knows no Marlowe. With *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, The Taming of the Shrew* and *Macbeth* he has made a more loyal bow to Shakespeare than any contemporary actor or manager. With *Richelieu* he has followed in the path that all the classic actors have trod. With his *Cyrano* he has scored the greatest popular success of his career. With *An Enemy of the People* he has shown that his interest in Ibsen is undiminished. With *The Servant in the House* he has indicated that the candles still flicker at his altar. With *Caponsacchi,* made from *The Ring and the Book,* he has pleased both the Browning Societies and a wide public that has been starved for costume and verse. He has done many good things and even much good. And meanwhile he has followed Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson and John Drew as the president of the Players' Club.

Meanwhile, too, that first Walter Hampden of the early matinees has all but faded from sight. Watch him now in Elsinore and you will see a tired man, an older and a graver prince. His student days are farther from him but not his student's mind. What remains is the work of a scholar, a footnoted thesis on what Hamlet was, a *Variorum* prince who flashes a Phi Beta Kappa key instead of a rapier. The simplicity of his former Hamlet has vanished, too. Now it is a mannered prince, a fussy prince, who breaks his speeches annoyingly, who uses his hands too much, who is given to attitudinizing, a prince whose wit is cold. It is a professor reading Hamlet better than any professor could ever read him. It has its class-room, but not its living, virtues. It is warmed by no errors of chance or human vagaries, no un-

quenchable theatre instincts, no moments of feeling Hamlet instead of thinking him.

What is lacking in Mr. Hampden's present-day Hamlet is also lacking in his Cyrano. His Cyrano has a big nose. It, too, is comprehended beyond doubt, and has its touching moments of sentiment. But it also has a campus air about it, the unhappy aroma of being a Harvard instructor hiding under the Cambridge elms to state the love of a luckier undergraduate for a Radcliffe girl. Gone are his swash-buckling, and the gruff humors, the gusto, of Rostand's soldier-poet. Mr. Hampden's Petruchio and his Romeo are stamped with the same pulpit qualities that are to be seen in Cyrano and that have overwhelmed his Hamlet. For all his noise, his Petruchio is more of a yogi than a tyrant; and his Romeo, in spite of all its running entrances and exits, is little more than a romanceless pedant. His Othello, for all its blackness of make-up, has a whiteness of heart that not only reduces his jealousy to a thin tremulo of complaint, but makes him seem no more than a benevolent member of Tuskegee's English Department. In *Henry V,* that stirring Elizabethan equivalent of a propaganda film, with enlistment as well as educational values, he gives no "mad-cap Harry" but a sensitive, finely etched picture of a General Booth fighting battles of the Salvation Army kind. His Caponsacchi cuts no light-hearted capers when he masquerades. Neither does his Crispin in *The Bonds of Interest.* His Richelieu, to be sure, is fine to look upon and has its moments of true eloquence. But it is only his Dr. Stockman, in Ibsen's frankly didactic meeting scene in *An Enemy of the People,* that moves with the real frenzy of the theatre which can sway emotions. And then, just as it is the doughty figure of Ibsen himself, greatcoat, side-whiskers and all, who has jostled Dr. Stockman off the platform

to plead his own case against the "compact majority," so it is Mr. Hampden, the teacher, with a class before him and a lecture to deliver, who carries the scene, persuasively and well.

Meanwhile the Hampden myth continues, winning for himself and for his company, such as it is, a personal following of a kind that is fast disappearing in the modern theatre. Both the myth and the following have not been built without foundations. Mr. Hampden is entitled to them both because he has allied himself with "the better things," because he is sincere, high-minded and industrious, because there is an undeniable nobility about his person, something holy, set-apart, gentle, intelligent, and well-meaning.

But there is a confusion, a Puritan, well-meaning confusion behind the myth, too. Being the theatre's great educator has unfortunately nothing to do with being the classic drama's great emancipator. So far, at least, he has mounted his plays, not released them. Though the moralists may regret it, holiness, high-mindedness, gentleness, good intentions, even intelligence are not enough to make a fine actor. There is still a flame — The Divine Spark if you will, though it has nothing in common with the divine attributes except its bestowal — for which none of the Sunday school virtues are responsible. It is that very spark which is notably lacking in Mr. Hampden, and without which all his scholarship, his idealism, and his nobility remain no more than personal virtues, making of him a servant, a very good servant in the house, but not a master.

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne

To describe the acting of Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt as generous is to set it apart as it should be set apart — indeed as it sets itself apart — from the acting that is commonly encountered in our playhouses. For generosity is among the rarer attributes in acting, a quality which through some unfortunate necessity seems to find its way but seldom into that atavistic world behind the footlights where self-assertion serves as the readiest means of self-preservation and where individuals, warring consciously or unconsciously against other individuals, are forced to fight their wearisome little battles for dominance.

Yet it is generosity that stands out most immediately in the acting of the Lunts and that offers in its own way the key to the talents they possess and the pleasures they provide. Without sacrificing their individualism Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt manage to play together as one, sharing their control of the stage and avoiding the fatigue of those minor manœuvres for the spotlight and for center stage upon which so many actors dissipate their gifts. By means of this unstinted giving they free themselves so that they can devote their full energies to showing off, rather than to showing up, each other. The natural result is that they have more to give both to a play and to an audience than most actors have.

Though this generosity of theirs is among the major virtues of their acting, it is not based upon the non-æsthetic principles of philanthropy. Its source, its solitary source, is

the unerring instinct for the theatre which they both possess and from which it springs. As a theatre and not a moral instinct, this generosity of theirs departs from the noble Christian doctrines of unselfishness, by balancing its mutual giving with its mutual taking. But, though this give and take of the Lunts may have no connection with the Sunday school moralities, it is none the less subservient to that good old Bible precept which maintains that charity begins at home.

The reason for this is, of course, and as everyone must know, that the Lunts are man and wife. And from this simple fact — which was once held to be the dullest as well as the most financially hazardous fate that could engulf either a star or a matinee idol — their acting derives not only its intimacy, its charm, and its daring, but also its special perfection. If, as they undoubtedly have, the Lunts have managed to turn their marriage into a theatrical asset rather than a liability, it is because they have never permitted themselves to dwindle into being a prosaic "Mr. and Mrs." in public.

They have not, as the Kendals did, and as a score of more recent couples have done, paraded the virtues and the mottoes of their hearthstone in public. Nor have they turned their stage into one of those genial models of domesticana in which the old folks claim to find so much comfort. To this day, though they are frequently spoken of as the Lunts, no one has yet thought of referring to them as Mr. and Mrs. Lunt. Instead they have contrived to remain so decisively themselves, that to the world at large — and even to themselves I suspect — they are still Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne.

Individuals though they are, and innocent as their playing is of the blemishes of domestic stuffiness, their acting

is nevertheless married acting, if one can call it that. But it is married acting that takes advantage of its status, that gains a new freedom from its bond, and that puts marriage, as it puts all things, to the uses of the theatre. As acting, it is so truthful in its minor details, and so uninhibited in its caresses and affectionate slaps that it once caused a dignified old lady to remark to her companion, after one of the more intimate love scenes in *Caprice,* "Isn't it nice, my dear, to know that they are married?"

Even more noteworthy than the unabashed frankness with which they authenticate their naturalism, is the contagious sense their work carries of their own enjoyment of what they are doing. Their pleasure literally shines through their performances, endowing them with the vitality of their own joy, and demonstrating, as one likes to see it demonstrated, that to the Lunts acting is obviously no hardship.

They do not come to it as if it were a nightly drudgery which they were forced to undergo. Nor are they perfunctory in their playing, limiting themselves to doing what they can "get away with" and no more. Rather they approach it (as is equally apparent both early and late in the run of the plays in which they appear) as a kind of sport, an exhilarating game which never seems to stale for them either in its pleasures or its challenges. Accordingly, whether they happen to be in *The Guardsman* or *The Brothers Karamazov, Goat Song* or *At Mrs. Beam's, The Doctor's Dilemma* or *The Second Man,* their acting is intensified by their whole-hearted surrender to it. For with them acting is not only acting but playing, and playing in the truest sense of the word. It is playing because they are fortunate enough to be perennial amateurs with professional standards and professional gifts.

It is at all times evident that they enjoy the words they have to speak, particularly the bigger speeches in the bigger scenes when they can cut loose from the everyday doldrums and indulge in the modified forensics the modern theatre grants them. It is evident, too, that they find an equal pleasure in the costumes they are called upon to wear, liking the feel of them and lending themselves gladly to their display. In the same way they approach their make-up, giving it their complete attention, and reveling in it as a means of masquerading and as an escape from themselves.

It is only six short years now since Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne joined the acting forces of the Theatre Guild to play — appropriately enough — the Actor and the Actress in *The Guardsman*. Before that time, Mr. Lunt, hailing from a Milwaukee which he has never quite managed to put behind him, had served his apprenticeship at the Old Castle Square Theatre in Boston, supporting such stars as Mrs. Langtry and Margaret Anglin in vaudeville or in Greek plays, and won his first notable successes in *Clarence* and in *Outward Bound*. Miss Fontanne, on the other hand, had started her career by "walking on" in a pantomime at Drury Lane, played many times in England, toured this country before the war, earned particular praise for her performance of Mrs. Collison in *My Lady's Dress,* and, in *Dulcy,* scored a decided triumph in New York. They had played together but once before they went to the Guild, and that was in 1923 when Mr. Lunt was Charles II to Miss Fontanne's naughty Lady Castlemaine in *Sweet Nell of Old Drury.*

In the six years which divide *The Guardsman* from *Meteor,* however, they have acted together in nine of the Guild's most interesting productions. Miss Fontanne, with her purring speech, has appeared as three of the Shavian

heroines, and, in addition to her many lighter parts, created the Nina Leeds of *Strange Interlude*. Mr. Lunt, in spite of obvious limitations to his acting range, and with a talent of a wider sort, has had his chance at such various rôles as O'Neill's Marco, Werfel's Maximilian, Ben Jonson's Mosca (as Stefan Zweig has restated him) and Babe Callihan in Sidney Howard's *Ned McCobb's Daughter*.

In short, these Lunts have been given at the Guild the finest acting opportunities of the last six years. They have not only had their opportunities, however, but they have also had the equipment and the temperaments to make the most of them. And that, as the Boy Scout leaders used to have it, is the better part of success.

Pauline Lord

Among the many realistic actresses of our stage none knows so well as Pauline Lord the values of keeping within herself the anguishes that convulse her, or of charging muteness with an electrifying eloquence which wrings the heart by saying everything without seeming to say anything. She is a flaming negative, the epitome of a choked and choking repression, and an inner torture that seems to spill little by little out of her stumbling frailty without ever quite emptying itself. The emotion which racks her and robs her very body of its stamina is never released without a struggle. It knows no direct escapes to utterance, no statements which are not overwhelmed by the impossibility of being made. It fairly fights its way out — tormented, panicky — and even then is but half expressed.

It seems to tie her tongue. And of the sentences she utters, in a thin, harried but echoing voice, it makes broken, trailing things, that are warmed with hope in their beginnings, but that subside, unfinished, into an unconquerable despair. Her sentences, which are trembling symbols rather than sentences, do not fight alone, however, because, even before she has launched on one of them, her arms have fluttered upward to protect it. One hand has pushed its way through her tousled hair to her forehead, that desperate forehead above those desperate eyes. It stays there but a moment, hardly reaches there in fact before it has slipped helplessly, and without apparent control, along the

contour of her cheek and fallen, limp with pain, across her trembling chin. Here, too, it finds no rest, but passes quickly to her mouth, her sobbing mouth, on which a half-formed smile has died.

Meanwhile the other arm has been trying to lift itself into a gesture. It has beaten its way upward again and again in a series of sudden, jerky little starts that never reach completion, fighting not only against itself but against that inner force which seems to have possessed it. The same negation that overtakes her speech, overtakes her body. It, too, is limp, swayed by the identical surcharge of emotion. Particularly in the moments of climax, when tragedy has closed in upon her and life seems to be riding this baffled, inarticulate woman down, her body reels, dizzily, drunkenly across the stage. It is numbed, relaxed beyond control but driven onward unthinkingly by the grief it cages. It fairly staggers under the weight of an inexpressible, devastating woe, propelled by some unreasoning muscular consciousness into going through a hundred silly, superbly irrelevant actions that are the automatic physical reflexes to the torture which has stunned her spirit.

It is by these muted means that Miss Lord has risen to the front rank of our tragic realists. They are limited means, to be sure, subject to a peculiar monotony, confined to a very special sphere of acting, but they are, nevertheless, rich in individual virtues. They are shown to their best advantage, when seen for the first or second times. Then — in the first glory of their revelation — they have a freshness, a poignancy, a directness, even a humanity, that is contrary to all the fluent, studied conventions of regulation acting. They seem so fitted in their stifled way to the speechless tragedies of the lower classes, that they are able to endow the commonplace with a kind of tragic grandeur of its own. They

manage to add to the prose of dull living and stunted thinking the poetry of a comprehension which is unphraseable. As Miss Lord uses them at her best, they are richly inventive means, illumined by the light of a human observation and a dramatic expression which carries with it the double values of the unexpected and the untraditional.

It is at such moments that Miss Lord lifts realistic acting into the realms of pure creation, and not only makes a scene her own but charges it with all the unuttered and unutterable implication of her methods. It was such a moment that she gave us in the last act of *Samson and Delilah* when, as she faced the revolver of the insanely jealous husband she had deceived, she huddled near a table and crawled, like a cornered animal, for safety into the next room. It was such a moment, too, or rather such a series of moments, that she gave us when she entered the waterfront saloon of *Anna Christie*. Then, in a few, unforgettable seconds, she painted the image of her past life, and wrote, even as she talked to Marthy and later to Chris, the autobiography of the suffering which lay behind that hesitant voice and that nervous, hunted manner.

As the little waitress in *They Knew What They Wanted,* who was tricked into coming to Tony's farmhouse in the Napa Valley under the impression that she was to be the wife of a young man, her methods rose again and again to a smothered lyricism of a similar but no less eloquent kind. Nor have these happy moments of Miss Lord disappeared. They were present, with the same force, the identical insight, even the same pathos in her playing of the wife on whom an invalided husband has turned in *Sandalwood;* her performance as Lily Cobb, the neurotic wife of the clerygman in Clemence Dane's *Mariners;* and in her characterization in *Spellbound* of the little murderess who lives a

separate, beckoning, over-real life in the world of her dreams.

The moments were there, but the first contact with the methods that made them has gone, and the smallness of the area covered by Miss Lord's art is revealed. What had seemed a continent is shown to be a province. The limitations of her attack have become increasingly apparent. To each new part, she has brought exactly the same methods. In each, though she has achieved fine, incomparable moments, it has become clear that she has waited for the moments to coincide with her methods rather than forcing her methods to fit the play as a whole. It has become discernible, too, that that very tottering frenzy she brought her climaxes is unfortified by the discipline or the control by which she can sustain a part throughout. Limp as her body may be, faltering as her speech is, her means of achieving them are rigid. She has brought no range to her voice, nor has she ever stiffened her body to make of it a positive instrument. Faced as she was in the second act of *Samson and Delilah* with the need of being the real Delilah in a rehearsal of her husband's play, she showed that, though she could be the wife, she could not play the actress.

Her inarticulateness seems fixed, not pliant or subject merely to the needs of a script. Her fluttering arms, her teetering walk, and the lilting monotony of her speech have lost something of their spontaneity, and hardened into mannerisms. They have their intermittent power, of course, but they are so marked and so unvarying, that it is at times difficult to separate them from that memorable parody of Miss Lord which Dorothy Sands once gave in *The Grand Street Follies*. So keen was Miss Sands' observance, so ready her wit in acting and so unsparing, though just, her creative

criticism, that for many of those who saw her, Miss Sands' burlesque has become a part of the real Miss Lord.

One cannot but wish that Miss Lord's acting, exquisitely etched as it is, had a greater scope, a freer, wider spaciousness, a more positive style, a readier pliancy, and a more resolutely heroic capacity. One cannot but regret that it seems forever bound down to doing the same things in the same middle-class rooms. If one wishes and regrets, it is because at those moments which she does command she brings to our theatre a beauty, a tragic, simple truth such as no other of our actresses can summon. And behind that beauty and that truth there seems to lurk a spirit — even a gift for laughing comedy — which is fettered by the small limits but high reaches of her perfection.

Lenore Ulric

See her but once, and you have ample proof of the technical dexterity of Lenore Ulric. You have proof, too, of that other factor which is an important part of her success in general, and, perhaps, her success with you. The play may be *Tiger Rose* or *The Son-Daughter; Kiki* or *The Harem.* Or it may be *Lulu Belle.* But it would be better — fairer for her and you — if it were not *Mima,* that nursery version of *Faust* on a Meccano Set with which Mr. Belasco has recently provided her.

It does not really matter, however, in which play you may have seen her, because all of them have pretty much in common. They have pretty much in common in spite of the fact that Mr. Belasco, who is the Burton Holmes of sex, may have sprinkled any one of them with Canadian mounted police, perfumed it with the joss of Chinatown, laid it in France, dressed it in Oriental bloomers, shaded it to Harlem, or liveried it in the royal red of purgatory. Through them all and their high-tensioned Rand McNally versions of pursuits and conquest, chaser and chasee, you have the diminutive figure of Lenore Ulric, with her great black eyes, her masses of black hair, her white, white skin, and her red, red lips. You see her, lithe, voluptuous, elemental and — I suppose it is the right word — earth-sprung. You watch her as the darling — well, not of the gods but, at any rate, of Elinor Glyn. And your emotions are supposed to be torn between your sympathy for Miss

Ulric, because of what she unwittingly kindles in the eyes of her beholders, and your human understanding of the urge which drives them on.

In each of them, it must be admitted, Miss Ulric seems to be a different person. She looks different, and has even acquired a different walk. And in each of them she is the mistress of many new tricks, which, though they may be laboriously acquired and seem to some like the well-learned lessons of a Miss Fotheringay, are none the less effective in covering her tracks. The difference may be a question of language. It may consist, as in *Tiger Rose,* of the broken speech of a half-breed of the great Northwest, or the faint, but skilful suggestion of a negro accent in *Lulu Belle.* Or it may be the Bret Harte Chinese-isms necessary to the poppied imagery of *The Son-Daughter* with which she decorates her ever husky voice. It may be a matter of costumes, such as the famous black and white short skirt, the terra cotta blouse and the powder puff of Kiki, or the black silk dress and the red gloves and hat of Lulu Belle. It may even include the complete conquest of such bodily devices as she achieved in her cataleptic trance in *Kiki,* or her impassioned specialty dance in *Lulu Belle.*

Whatever the tricks may be, however, you can depend upon their being thoroughly acquired, mastered with no small mechanical facility, and projected with no ordinary authority. You can be almost equally certain, too, that they will not sink far below the surface. The walk, the speech, the dress may be different, but they will express the same emotions in the same way, regardless of the time or the longitude, and with just about the same latitude. They will be no more subtle than the remarkably unsubtle plays for which they are so admirably suited. Like them, they are excellent contrivances as far as they go, calculated to deceive, devised

to catch applause and unquestionably successful in achieving their ends. Once again like the plays, and their tawdry, overloaded pictures of grief, their sentimentality, their superficial woes and their smoking-room naughtiness — these tricks of Miss Ulric evoke no end of thoughtless rapture, sniffles in the dark, and aching red eyes when the house lights come on.

They cast a spell undoubtedly, and make her seem the very incarnation of the tragic muse to the nursemaids and their kinds — both in and out of uniform — who crowd to see her, this Zaza of the flapper age. But it is an easy sorcery Miss Ulric commands, that invites their most naïve group emotions to awaken and their minds to slumber. It is the kind of acting which leaves nothing for an audience to do. Inference and implication are unknown to it, because it says everything it has to say immediately. It is expert of its kind, but hollow. Above all it is explicit to the point of being wooden and without imagination.

It has a way of simplifying things, ironing out their complexities, and flattening them into the terms of the unmistakable. It gives a magazine cover version of tragedy, a tabloid picture of life, running its every emotion in italics and its changeless passion in headlines. It seems to be reenforced by no strength that is untaxed. Of interior beauty it is as totally lacking as it is in the comment on a character, which, in subtler performers, is simultaneous with characterization. It hits hard and it hits directly, making its statement in the glaring, instantaneous manner of a poster. Like a poster, though it attracts the attention, and fills the eye for the passing moment, it succeeds because it needs no second visit to be understood and no second thought to be enjoyed.

It gets applause, of course; quick, hearty applause which

is deserved. Because, in spite of all the overtones in acting that she may lack, Miss Ulric is the undisputed queen of crowd-catchers. Among her tricks she numbers that greatest of palm-warming devices, the trick of making what she is doing seem more difficult to do than it really is, of breathing heavily, and working herself into such a state of exhaustion that an audience is persuaded to mistake industry for achievement. If her acting is "the result of a good deal of pains," as Dr. Johnson once said of the dullness of Sheridan's father, the vibrant monotone of sex she maintains is ease and spontaneity itself. But she — or was it Mr. Belasco? — is shrewd enough to realize that effortful acting and effortless sex are the very virtues out of which Tin Pan Alley culls a Mrs. Siddons.

Katharine Cornell

Of all the younger actresses in our theatre none holds a higher or more lustrous place than Katharine Cornell. She is alone among them in commanding by the very magic that her name has come to spell, a personal following of the magnitude and kind which is now commanded by a sparse handful of the older players. Nor are her admirers confined merely to what the census-takers refer to as Greater New York.

Miss Cornell has been too wise to ignore the country at large, as so many of the younger actresses have done who have won their metropolitan importance in these later years. She has braved the inconveniences of trouping and carried each of her outstanding successes on tours that show her vision is not limited to the acreage of an island.

Accordingly she enjoys on the road as well as in New York a popularity that is equalled only by her prestige. Everywhere she is known and spoken of with an admiration that exceeds the bounds of passing favor. Though she is taken seriously, she is none the less adored; watched for by the critics and waited for at the stage-door. She has the capacity, which is an essential capacity in actors who are ambitious, for inspiring an enthusiasm that amounts to idolatry. But the partisanship she kindles is more characterful than is the usual fan mail kind. For to the playgoers of America she has emerged not only as a glamorous and incandescent woman, but also as a person to be admired for

her talents and her beauty, but admired most particularly because her acting is of such a nature that it invites hopes to be invested in it.

To almost everyone, Miss Cornell seems to be the foremost of our younger actresses. As such it is only natural that she should evoke adjectives which are not ordinarily bestowed, even when the currency of superlatives is as debased as it now is. Nor is it anything but natural that hers should be referred to, not merely as the most promising among those talents that are now in their full prime, but that she should also be singled out as the actress who comes nearest to being blessed with the qualities of which greatness is made.

Miss Cornell's claims upon these attributes are many, for in her person, and quite without regard for her talents as an actress, she possesses many of the actor's requisites. If it is not beauty that she has — with her dark hair parted in the middle and drawn back simply from her broad forehead, her wide-spaced eyes, her generous mouth, her ivory pallor, her long neck, her Egyptian shoulders and her slim, gracefully angular body — it is something more than beauty. It is interest of an irresistible kind, distinctive to the point of oddity, haunting and exotic, mutable and set apart, but so definitely her own in each of its hot-house shadings and in spite of its constant changes, that it acquires the virtues of memorability as well as grace.

Though in her diction Miss Cornell is still so troubled by her "r's" that her speech flattens out perceptibly whenever she stumbles upon them in moments of high tension, her voice — like her appearance — is peculiar to herself, low in its pitch, rich in its coloring and insinuating in its melody. So, too, are her movements for Miss Cornell has an unearthly way of slinking across a stage which is very much

her own. When she sits, it is also in her own special manner, because she does not perch upon a sofa or a chair as most ordinary mortals do, but fits into its outlines until she seems to be a part of it.

While Miss Cornell's distinctive qualities as a person are decidedly in her favor as an actress, they by no means cover her endowments. They are only the instruments with which she works. For in addition to the crowd-catching assets her playing boasts in her tragic allure, her *sympatica morbidezza,* and her "malicious animal magnetism" (if it is permissible to misuse a phrase of Mrs. Eddy's in order to avoid a no less famous one of Mrs. Glyn's) she has a technical assurance which is unequalled among the younger actresses.

Its strength lies in the completeness of its poise and that undeviating certainty of Miss Cornell's which permits her both to take and use her time to excellent advantage. Her acting is wisely conscious of its points, making them in a definitely theatrical manner without ever sinking into tawdry theatricalities; making them in fact by a hushed but palpitant understatement which gives her the added power that always comes from keeping something in reserve. It is guided by an intelligence that she brings to each fresh performance, and warmed by the whole-heartedness with which she gives herself to each new part and each new play. Thus it is that Miss Cornell has earned — and deserved — her title as "the foremost of our younger actresses" by virtue of her personal endowments and her technical equipment, and because of the conscientious thoroughness of her workmanship.

It is for these reasons that her appearance as the unsavory murderess in such a trashy bit of clap-trap as *Dishonored Lady* is something more than regrettable. By lending

her presence to such a sordid and worthless melodrama, Miss Cornell has shown once again how readily she squanders her time and her talents upon scripts that are not worthy of either. If *Dishonored Lady* were the first time that Miss Cornell had involved herself in trash it would have been easy to laugh it off as a tempting mistake in judgment to which any actress is entitled. But as Miss Cornell has enmeshed herself for several seasons now in such plays as *The Letter, The Green Hat* and a well-costumed but badly written dramatization of *The Age of Innocence,* it has begun to seem as if she had a preference for the adventuresses, the murderesses and the constant nymphomaniacs who have strayed through these piffling scripts.

When one remembers that *A Bill of Divorcement, Nice People, Will Shakespeare* and *The Outsider* came at the outset of her career, Miss Cornell's admirers cannot but be apprehensive. Because as the years have passed and Miss Cornell has ripened as an actress, she has gone astray too often for her own good in plays and parts that were beneath her. She has brought an undiminished glamor to each of these parts. And she has enjoyed the triumphs (which must have been easy triumphs in her case) that come from gilding mediocre scripts with the distinction that is so inalienably her own. But they have been costly triumphs, too, for by allying herself so unrelievedly with the third-rate, she has of late begun to imperil her prestige, if not her popularity.

If Miss Cornell finds, as most people do find, that great plays are not exactly plentiful just now, she has only to remember that there are far better plays being written and produced than those upon which she has wasted herself for several seasons. There are also any number of the great acting parts in the classics, real and near, which she has thus

far neglected, and which she owes not only to herself but to her public.

Until now her Candida has been the only one of her performances to which audiences could bring the standards of comparative judgments. Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekov and the rest still lie before her, to challenge her talents, widen her range and save her from the pallid damozels for whom her fondness now seems so marked. And they, or at least a self-reliant playwright of her own discovering, must come her way and come fairly soon, if Miss Cornell is to establish herself as the important actress she shows every potentiality of becoming — if she only wants to.

Eva Le Gallienne

Some ten years ago a weary, white-faced, stoop-shouldered little waif stepped on to the stage of the Garrick Theatre accompanied by a round-eyed girl who was given to the most chirruping of giggles. The scene, which followed close upon a noisy but colorful prologue at Mrs. Muskat's carousel, was a park in Molnar's Budapest, indicated simply by a bench and a background of shadowy trees and bushes. The play, of course, was *Liliom*. And the waif none other than Eva Le Gallienne.

But the first lines she spoke as Julie still echo in the ears of the remembering, charged now with a strangely prophetic value. They come to mind for the simple reason that as Miss Le Gallienne entered she looked over her shoulder and asked two questions which since the founding of the Civic Repertory Theatre have been heard many times, asked now about Miss Le Gallienne rather than Mrs. Muskat; asked in admiration or perplexity, even petulantly put. The questions — as you may guess whether you happen to remember *Liliom* or not — were, "Did you ever hear of such a thing? What's the matter with the woman anyway?"

They were legitimate questions to be sure, because when Miss Le Gallienne cleaned the old Fourteenth Street Theatre of its garlic, its cobwebs and its dirt, and opened its doors as the Civic Repertory Theatre, she was defying almost every tradition that is dear to the little gods

of Forty-second Street. In the first place, she was announcing repertory; in the second, she was promising a Civic Theatre; in the third, she was planning to operate a playhouse far outside the bounds of the regulation theatre district; in the fourth, she was challenging that unwritten law of present-day theatrical management (which seems to hold that an American audience's enjoyment of a play increases in exact proportion to the amount in which the price asked for its tickets happens to exceed their budgets) by pledging a top price of $1.50 for evening performances and $1.00 for matinees. And finally — though by no means last — as an actress who was on the verge of a comfortable, even a prosperous stardom, she was jeopardizing her whole career in the commercial theatre by turning non-conformist.

Worse than all this, she was competing with the manager-producers, and competing with them on their own ground. Not satisfied with invading their territory and taking over their worries, she was also planning to act her plays and be her own director. And her hopes for success were staked upon the plays of such men as Chekov, Benavente, Ibsen, Heijermans, and the rest of the so-called "highbrow" brotherhood! Of course, the wiseacres laughed — loud and long. Of course, they asked each other, "What's the matter with the woman anyway?"

This was not the first time that they had heard about repertory. They might have even talked of it themselves at public dinners, because there is no denying that repertory does sound well over coffee and cigars. Yes, they might have used the word, though, as they understood the term, repertory doubtless meant announcing five plays but hoping that the first of these to reach production would be so successful that the other four would not have to be thought of again. Certainly they had no such silly notion in mind as

changing their bills each night in the manner advocated (and practised) by Miss Le Gallienne. Be that as it may, repertory was a favorite subject of discussion in 1926. It was, heaven knows, the darling of every clever press agent. Because the air was then thick with big words, hurled pompously into space, while all public discussions usually ended with a hushed recitation of the glories of the Comédie-Française by men who, when in Paris, patronized the *Folies-Bergères*. To the cynical, therefore, Miss Le Gallienne's announcement looked like just one more of those magnificent promises which are born each fall on a press agent's typewriter and get no further than his press list.

The knowing ones laughed. But they did not know the fiber of this twenty-seven-year-old daughter of Richard Le Gallienne and Julie Norregaard, who had spent her childhood with her mother near the great state theatres of the continent, who had gone on the stage at fourteen, and who, two years later, had come to this country with the dream of becoming a star and "having my name in electric lights." Even if they had known her record, it would have meant little to them. Because they knew enough to know that Miss Le Gallienne had already realized her ambition. At twenty-five she was a star in *The Swan* and her name was in electric lights.

In this theatre of ours, where an actor's happiness is presumed to be a matter of wattage and his talents are supposed to be measured in terms of Mazda, they naturally thought she was happy. They had no way of knowing what was passing through her mind even at the time of *Liliom*. "At first I was happy," she has written in her preface to a collection of Civic Repertory Plays, "in a hitherto unknown security; that is, I knew I could pay my rent and live in

moderate comfort. Then I began to be restless. Was that all? Surely there must be something else? I began to look about me. I realized that I knew little or nothing as an actress, and also I knew that to learn one must keep working at top-speed. The mere fact of playing the same play, no matter how fine, over and over again, for a period of months, running into years, did not provide sufficient material for maximum development. Yet everyone did it, and nearly everyone seemed satisfied."

Not Miss Le Gallienne, however, whose energy made her a "perpetual nuisance" to her managers before she fumigated her present theatre on Fourteenth Street. Not the Miss Le Gallienne, who even in the days of *Liliom* was putting on Maeterlinck's *Aglavaine and Sélysette* for "two shockingly bad performances" but learning "a lot at the expense of a very sparse audience." Certainly not the Miss Le Gallienne, who, when *The Swan* was most triumphant, was finding time to give matinees of Hauptmann's *Hannele* (her first experience in direction) and to play a few stray performances in French with Madame Simone in *La Vierge Folle*. And assuredly not the Miss Le Gallienne who, after *The Swan* and during the heat of an excessively hot July, indulged a mad taste for leadership by crossing the ocean to present *Jehanne d'Arc* and *The Mother of Christ* in a cruelly indifferent Paris.

When the next season found Miss Le Gallienne plunging into morning matinees of *The Master Builder* at her own risk at a top price of $1.50, after several managers had refused to back her project, the initiates must have laughed again. But when *The Master Builder* turned into a success, and was followed by *John Gabriel Borkman,* which was also a success, they probably modulated their laughter —

until they saw her announcement of the Civic Repertory Theatre.

Many may have chuckled then. But even those who did not must have wondered if she realized the labor her plan involved, the self-sacrifice, the patience, the disappointment, and the superhuman energy it would exact, even if it lasted but a month or two. What no one had gauged correctly, however, was either Miss Le Gallienne's capacity for work, or her public's eagerness for the kind of theatre with which she was to provide them. Accordingly when everyone else was still at phrases, she was deep in rehearsals. And by October — October 25, 1926, to be exact — she was ready to ring up her curtain on an experiment in personal leadership unique and as brave as the contemporary New York theatre has seen. Moreover she was ready to ring it up in a characteristic manner.

She opened with a gesture of defiance that was big enough, and bold enough, to win the immediate attention, if not the immediate favor, of her public, and to send consternation to the hearts of her professional advisers. Though her two Ibsen plays were now bettered by performance, Miss Le Gallienne did not want to introduce her project with them. As a showman she knew the value of playing her trump card first. And being Miss Le Gallienne she led off with two trumps at one and the same time. Where almost any other manager would have looked for only one new play, and contented himself with that, Miss Le Gallienne looked for two, and succeeded in finding two that were as difficult as her bitterest enemy could have unearthed for her. On the first night she played Benavente's *Saturday Night* and on the second Chekov's *The Three Sisters,* and with each she gambled heavily on performances that opened "cold" in New York, given by a newly assembled company

that had had no preliminary tryout on the road. It was undoubtedly a hazardous, if not a foolhardy, thing to do. But it was possessed of the kind of courage and the sort of P. T. Barnum effrontery that dazzles an American audience as much as it delights it. For in one week she had acquired not only a theatre and a repertory, but was changing her bill nightly and playing *The Three Sisters, Saturday Night, The Master Builder* and *John Gabriel Borkman* in rotation.

Now, five years later, her Civic Repertory Theatre has ceased to be a wild-cat project and become an institution. Behind it is a record of more than twenty-five productions, some of them flat failures, many amateurish, more uneven, but almost all of them characterized by an intention that is above the average. Each season has seen its outstanding successes of such a genuine kind that they have given uptown manager-producers cause for envy. But while the successes have been made to carry the failures, in no case have they been allowed to crowd them out of the repertory. Nor have they been employed as excuses to raise the admission charge above the initial pledge.

Little by little almost all of the productions have found their way to a public that has seemed to want them — long after they would have been shelved on Broadway. And while the audiences have grown, so too has the strength of the acting company. To the decided artistic, as well as financial, credit of Miss Le Gallienne's organization (which might almost be called the house that Chekov built) have been her productions of *The Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard* and *The Sea Gull.* And to the list of her Chekov revivals must be added the glamorous enchantment of her *Romeo and Juliet,* the idyllic serenity of *Cradle Song,* the pleasant sweetness of *The Women Have Their Way, The Good Hope* with its excellent genre studies, and Barrie's *Peter Pan,*

which braved and conquered the jinx of the Maude Adams myth.

Behind everything this Civic Repertory does is the dominant, driving, indefatigable figure of a young woman who possesses a hungry adventurousness of spirit that bows to neither precedent nor defeat. It is she who is the Civic Repertory Theatre, and the Civic Repertory which is she. She has both energy and curiosity. And her energy is luckily of such a kind that it leads her curiosity into action. There are better actresses in New York than Miss Le Gallienne and there are more capable directors, too. But she is not only an actress or a director. She is a force, a kind of Little Corporal who seems happiest in the smoke of action, a dynamo with ideas as well as a will of her own. And as such she is a figure who knows no parallel in our contemporary theatre.

3

Enter the Scenic Artist

It reached this country some fifteen years ago, labelled, as is the wont of revolutions in art, with a title, an immodest, even a defiant title. It was called "the New Movement in the Theatre"—an arrogant confession of naïveté, if you will, but also a confession of its having been born of the theatre and not of the historians. With its coming the director achieved a new importance in the cabinet of theatre artists, and the designer, as we know him today, entered the American theatre. If this so-called "New Movement" was an entrance cue for the scenic artist, it was also an exit cue for the hack scene painter who had devoted his life to painting backdrops in perspective, and thyroidal leaves on fish-net borders, to say nothing of drop curtains of the Grand Canal in which advertisements for chewing gum, scalp lotions, and baby powders rudely challenged the temporal sway of the Doges.

When it first invaded this country some fifteen or twenty years ago—and that is quite long ago when measured by the theatre's fleeting sense of time—the New Movement was really new—to us. It had come from

Europe, as have so many of the influences that have swept across our stages, from the theatrical Europe which Craig, Appia, Reinhardt, Fuchs and a hundred others had ignited by the impact with their new doctrines and their new practises. It had crossed the high seas, carrying the open warfare it had waged on the established order at home to untried battlefields abroad. It had its couriers, its heralds — Sheldon Cheney, Hiram Kelly Moderwell, and Kenneth Macgowan — American critics who in lectures, articles and books expounded its ideas, set forth its history and fought as tenaciously for our understanding of its principles as ever Archer, Gosse and Shaw battled for Ibsen in England.

It came as a challenge, hot with the breath of protest, empowered with the magic that invites alignments and that is able to create factions. It seemed at first to some of the critics — and still does — a lot of airy nonsense, a hullabaloo without excuse; at best a nuisance that only added to their worries another field for exploration, which, perhaps, entailed the bother of having to tack on another paragraph to their reviews. They liked its single instances well enough. *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife* was all right. They did not question that. But many of them rebelled from the importance which was being attached to it as a tendency.

To some of the actors, particularly the older ones, its coming must have seemed an insult, a threat to the supremacy of their profession and a thorn in the side of their personal vanity. They had heard about this Gordon Craig of course and his silly notions about banishing actors from the stage and putting Über-Marionettes in their place. They may not have added that their hearing was largely hearsay and their reaction principally due to misquoted statements or misinterpreted intentions, because many of them had not — and have not — read their Craig. On the face of it he

did not seem "theirs" to read. "What truck!" they said and quite naturally scoffed at Craig, forgetting he once had been one of them and had even acted with Irving and Terry in this country; forgetting likewise that their own Duse had once wanted to purge the stage of its actors. "Do without us?" they laughed. "We'd like to see him try. Why since Thespis we have been —" and they were started. Often they added the consolation of invectives to their complaints, as we all do when we are faced with something that we do not understand. But generally they dismissed Craig with that most ancient of solaces for wounded pride —"The man must be crazy!" And, for a time, that was that.

To the manager-producers this New Movement must have seemed a lot of idle chatter of a transcendental kind, if for no other reason than because it had not yet demonstrated its box-office value. Anyway it had to do with art. It *was* art-y. There was no question about that. Its leaders and its expounders were constantly talking about such things as "The Art of the Theatre" and "The Art Theatre," and that saved the manager-producers from having to consider it except as a passing joke. To the public, too, it must have seemed, at least, remote. For not only were its principles abstract concepts — and there is nothing to win the crowd immediately, if ever, in either a concept or an abstraction, particularly when they are both æsthetic — but its leaders were obviously divided.

Accordingly the "New Movement" began to lose something of its true perspective. Its idea of unity of production, evolving as it did from Wagner's old theory of *Gesammtkunstwerk,* was clouded over. So, too, was its attendant ideal of a perfected interrelation of the arts of the theatre, and its espousal of a complete integration of the component elements of a production. Its stressing of the importance of the

director as the controlling master, the ultimate interpreter in theatre terms, the conductor orchestrating the performance, was in the same way forgotten. It was only natural, therefore, that to those who were annoyed both by it and its pretensions — and even to those whose concern was its defense — the "New Movement" emerged in this country as the fight for the designer. Some of its enemies went so far as to say its sole aim was the celebration of a scene-maker's holiday at the expense of the theatre as a whole. And some of its designers gave them grounds for their attacks. But it came, we saw, and it conquered — more or less.

Its flag was raised against photography. Its avowed enemy was the cluttered stage of non-selective realism which the Naturalists — Antoine, Zola and the rest — had fought for when Free Theatres began to dot the map of Europe in the 'Eighties and 'Nineties. Its hope was an imaginative theatre, where the knick-knacks of the everyday were to be dropped as the supercargo of an inglorious past, and the few, paramount essentials — which had meaning in the theatre as well as in life — were to be raised to a fresh and glorious significance. The henchman who prided himself on his ability to assemble real wooden panelling, real tin roofs, and real meat for scenes in butcher shops was to go. So, too, was the man he had replaced, the painter whose meticulous, one-dimensional backdrops took everything into consideration except the three-dimensional body of the actor. This master of perspective was proscribed because of the simple fact that the actor's body seemed to grow larger instead of smaller as he walked away from the audience and approached those lines which converged on the backdrop at the painter's whim. The painter and the henchman of realism were to go. And their places were to be taken by a new

race of artists, or rather by an old race of craftsmen raised to the rank of artists because of their new sensing of their crafts. The stage designer was to succeed them, the scenic artist who in the New Movement was fighting for his place in the spotlight, fighting more specifically to put his hackdom behind him and to enter the theatre as a collaborator of importance, an interpreter who had something to say in the visual terms of his medium, and who, as an artist, invited judgment as much by what he left out as by what he put in.

Of course this New Movement which had made itself felt in the capitals of Europe and which — some fifteen years later — was ushering in the new order of American designers was no single, unified effort. It had no particular panacea for the ills of the existing theatre. It took any number of forms and paraded under countless banners. Beneath the variety of its manifestations, however, there was a widespread dissatisfaction with existing conditions which provided one consolidated front, even if it afforded no supreme command. It was a movement, not a school. And the difference is great, so great that there was ample room within it to house many leaders, many theories, many schools.

There was, for example, the Russian camp of painters, distinguished painters to be sure, men like Bakst, Golovin, Benois, Roerich, Anisfeld, Soudeikine and the rest, who entered the theatre as easel artists, anxious to turn to the bigger canvases that backdrops offered; colorists whose palettes were warm and sensuous, who gave an old tradition a new life rather than founding a new one; renovators rather than innovators. There was Gordon Craig, in America the most widely known of the new leaders because of his many books and *The Mask,* his magazine and his pulpit. Yes, there was Craig indeed — personal, petty, and quarrelsome,

yet luminous in the white heat of his inspiration, possessing not only many talents and many interests, but fired with the flame of genius, a figure to attract and hold the attention, a stimulant and an irritant, a paradox to catch the public's eye and a prophet to exalt the artists.

There was Craig with his haunting sketches, his scale that bowed to the physical limitations of no proscenium, his pleas for unity of production, his screens, his attacks on realism, his diatribes against playwrights, and his stubborn refusal to consider acting as an art. There were, too, those prodding doctrines of his which were vibrant with the awareness of divine mission so common to all Messiahs, and which pointed the way, even if vaguely, to a new day and proved, with his designs, a veritable font of inspiration for all designers and writers who followed in his phosphorescent wake. There was also Adolphe Appia, that quieter Swiss, with his technically stated understanding of the spatial relations between the actor's body and the background, seeking plastic, three-dimensional, living settings; pleading for "rhythmic spaces"; depending upon the sorcery of lighting for his atmospheric abstractions; and making his memorable designs for Wagner's *Ring*. Like Craig a theorist and a scenic artist of the first magnitude, he was with Craig the precursor of the new order.

Tracking fast upon the two of them was Max Reinhardt, he of the titanic energies, the practical man of the theatre, the producer and the opportunist. Though his first revolt was from the older theatre of realism of which he was once both a part and a master, his next rebellions were to be from himself. Having apparently no permanent principle, except change, to demand his allegiance, and lacking any preoccupation of greater constancy than that which each production offered as it came along, Reinhardt has borrowed

at will and abandoned without notice. But he has provided opportunities for endless talents and vastly enriched the theatre by his multifarious undertakings. As the master showman of the New Movement it has been he who, in an outstanding way, has made the doctrines of the theorists practical and provable. He has worked coöperatively with many designers and carried the newest methods of stagecraft up and down the continent and to America. And by his handling of crowds and the spectacular quality underlying his productions he has shown the visual contribution a virtuoso director can make.

On the heels of these forerunners, experimentors of many sorts came forward, experimenting in many manners, but aiming always at liberating the backstage and bringing a new, meaningful and simple beauty to its decorations. Scenery of all kinds appeared: settings made with screens; settings made without screens but with curtains; pylons that were easily adjustable and which by rearrangement could offer the necessary indications of a change in locale; stylized settings that frankly employed only the salient outlines of a period, a room or a place and that demonstrated, with great economy of means, the theatrical advantages of suggestion; permanent settings; permanent stages; architectural stages; plastic stages and the rest, which steadily proclaimed the vitality of the new impulses.

The costumers, like the scenic artists, also ceased to be content with either historicity or fidelity to the contemporary fact. They, too, commenced to realize it was essential for stage clothes to be more than period clothes or the dress of everyday, if they were to reveal their fullest value or be freighted with their richest suggestion. Accordingly, the costumers also became designers; inventors and contributors in their own rights, putting the fact behind them in

favor of the effect. Their creations began to take on a beauty and a meaning which was not only special to the needs of the single production for which they were made, but fitted, most especially, to the enlargements and the falsification forever demanded by the theatre. The eye as well as the ear was suddenly invited to play its part in the enjoyment and understanding of the stage.

A host of other figures began to work in their various ways with the new ends in view, particularly the architects, the engineers, and the electricians. New types of theatres were built — small ones such as the Vieux Colombier in Paris, huge ones such as the Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin; theatres of all kinds which in their very planning attempted to establish fresh relations between the actor and his audience. Either they harked back to the Greeks in their use of an orchestra circle and the Elizabethans for the precedent of a platform jutting out into the heart of the audience, or they aimed at finding a strictly modern solution to the architectural problems with which a new day and a new stagecraft confronted them. The engineers became as interested in the possibilities of the backstage as the architects were with the auditoriums and the exteriors. Accordingly they provided new kinds of stages, better suited to the special exigencies of repertory theatres and constructed them so as to cut down the long, distracting intermissions which once had been the rule. Particularly in Germany, where elevator, wagon, sinking, or revolving stages were installed in practically all the state theatres of Berlin and the provinces, the machinist achieved a new importance.

An importance of a more enduring kind was reached by the electrician with the perfecting of the electric light for stage purposes. Its coming opened up an unexplored conti-

nent of beauty and illusion to the theatrical experimentors, and as much as, if not more than, anything else made the New Movement possible. If the old-fashioned painter and the photographic realist were to be replaced by the designer it was, because of the work of such men as Fortuny, Schwabe and Hasait, largely due to the electrician. It was he who was to emerge as the great colorist of the modern theatre. It was the electrician, too, who was to be of the utmost assistance in simplifying and intensifying its means by the shafts of light with which he could stab the darkness of the stage, or illumine only its significant features, even while he was shrouding them with mystery and lending them the values of palpable contrast. In a hundred different ways theatrical Europe was suddenly awakened to the greatest impetus it had felt since the raucous voice of Ibsen had awakened it from a dreamless slumber.

It was the visual impetus, speaking to the eye as Ibsen has spoken to the mind, a part of the New Movement, not all of it; but a part that, like the movement as a whole, aimed at releasing the theatre from what Victor Hugo had once called "the vice of the commonplace." It sought to restore to the theatre its beauty and its dignity, its imagination and romance, its quality of being theatre; a quality, incidentally, which the realists had come to condemn with such a meaningless term of abuse as "theatricality." As well condemn an apple for being too like an apple, a living room for being too like a living room, a statue for being too like a statue, as condemn the theatre for being too like the theatre!

As far as the scenic artist is concerned, the part he has played in making the ideals of the insurgents tangible, both in Europe and later in America, has certainly not been inconsiderable. The medium through which he speaks is not

the simple one that many have supposed, and must be considered in terms of its complexities before the designer's share in the New Movement can be fairly considered. He cannot make a sketch, a charming sketch of a room with flowing stairs, high windows, a great door at the back, and decorative figures sitting still in vague and graceful chairs, and consider his work done. His task is infinitely more complicated than his designs in the exhibition rooms might indicate. It is, in fact, even more complicated than the painter's task, because, though like the painter, the designer achieves his composition within a frame (in his case the proscenium arch) he cannot, as the painter can, center his attention on a single grouping, a changeless arrangement which will be changeless for all time. To the painter, because he works with static, or if you prefer, arrested, figures, the problem of putting his stairs there, or his windows here, is a matter that must be considered only in terms of the single composition which is his immediate concern. If, as an independent artist, the painter finds he does not want or need those windows or those stairs, or discovers that they interfere with his conception as he now may see it, he is free to dispense with them. Not so the designer, who is the servant of the play, who must supply the needs of the script before he satisfies himself, and who must bear in mind, not only the specific wants of the author and the director, but the acting and production requirements which practicality demands.

The designer, it should be remembered, works in terms of not one but many groupings. His setting must house not one action but many actions and serve the full flux of the unfolding drama and its actors. To maintain balance in his composition the designer cannot, therefore, depend as the painter can upon one changeless source of light, or the

fixed values that certain colors or brocades may possess. He must think, and compose, in terms of movement; and accommodate his backgrounds not only to the shifting postures and positions of single actors in the scenes between his principals, but must make them equally hospitable to large crowds and different lights and colors. When he decides upon the placing of that door or those stairs his first thought must be whether or not his scheme has theatrical as well as compositional values. Does it harmonize with the requirements of the text? Does it have the asset of display which can transform a mere coming into a room into an entrance? And will his colors, that seem so pleasant in his design, maintain their values when they are submitted to the changes lighting may effect?

The designer's sketch, as Lee Simonson once said, is only "a record of intention." Certainly it gives no indication of the actual work which the scenic artist must do. For when he has settled on his ground plan; had it approved by the director, the manager-producer, the carpenter and often by the leading actor; looked up the period details he may need; made elaborate blue prints for every scene and every detail in every scene; tracked down the proper furniture; picked out the required hangings; assembled the vases, the lighting fixtures and the what-nots, the scenic artist still has plenty of work ahead of him. He must get bids from the studios at which his scenery is to be actually painted; superintend the painting; see that the carpenters are not making his columns square when they should be round; make certain that all these odds and ends are getting done on time; ascertain that proper arrangements have been made for carting the scenery to the right theatre, look after its hanging by union stagehands; see that it is lighted correctly; and be ready to make those last-minute

shifts and readjustments which, for one reason or another, always seem to be necessary in the theatre.

As Robert Edmond Jones said in the preface to his *Drawings for the Theatre,* "The scene designer is forced to work and think in a hundred different ways — now as an architect, now as a house-painter, now as an electrician, now as a dressmaker, now as a sculptor, now as jeweler. He must make idols and palaces and necklaces and frescoes and caparisons. As he works he may be all too well aware of the outward limitations of the play he is to decorate and the actors he is to clothe. But in his mind's eye he must see the high original intention of the dramatist, and follow it; and the actors who out of the range of their own knowledge and their wisdom are to recreate that vision on the stage must seem to him what the artist seemed to the old Thibetan painter, pure Spirit, ascending. The designer's sole ambition must be to affirm and ennoble the art of these mystical Protagonists. And he must rest content only when we say, as the curtain rises on the work of his hands: 'It is evident that this play we are about to see is no common play. It is evident that these men and women who will appear before us are no common mummers. These are Actors, Seers, Sayers. Let us honor them. For by their inspiration they intimate immortality.' "

This desire to lift the theatre beyond the confines of the usual, to charge it with a quality of uncommonness, to endow it with an expectancy and an importance of its own, was one of the most characteristic attributes of the scenic artists who emerged from the New Movement. They wanted to bring not only beauty to their work, but meaning, too. They wanted to add to the play a new element of sorcery. They wanted their settings to be builders of mood, reminders of fate, visual characters. Arrangement and selection

seemed as necessary to them as it had seemed false to Zola and the Naturalists. Unlike Zola they wanted the theatre, as an art, to be "something outside of man and nature"; something that was truest to itself and owed its first allegiance to its own medium. Accordingly they took the creed of Shaw's Louis Dubedat as their own, and with him pinned their faith on "the might of design, the mystery of color," and "the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting."

It was with such ideals that the New Movement first invaded America. It came as an irritant, because it disturbed the theatre's complacency, asked it to abandon its triviality, and — at least in its better moments — take itself seriously as an art. The result of its coming has been some of the sheerest beauty our theatre has known. Here as in Europe a host of new talents have been recruited to the theatre's service under its banner: electricians, such as Munroe Pevear, Thomas Wilfred and Stanley R. McCandless; costumers such as James Reynolds, Milia Davenport, and Fania Mindell; architects such as Joseph Urban; but, oddly enough, no engineers or machinists of any eminence enjoyed by their continental rivals. Here, also as in Europe, the designer has emerged as a figure of importance, playing perhaps an even greater rôle than was his lot in Europe because America has, as yet, produced no virtuoso directors, of the kind that Europe boasts, to overshadow him completely.

From those short fifteen years of its American sway, two generations of scenic artists have already contributed richly to our stage, particularly to the stages of New York. Of the older generation — which is by no means an older generation except in the theatre's erratic chronology — Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson and Norman-Bel Geddes have emerged as the prophets and high-priests and chief

practitioners of scenic art in this country, closely seconded by a roster which includes such designers as Joseph Urban, Claude Bragdon, Woodman Thompson, Raymond Sovey, Aline Bernstein and Cleon Throckmorton. Following fast upon them is a younger generation, led by Jo Mielziner and Donald Oenslager (who seem to parallel in their generation the parts played respectively by Simonson and Jones in theirs) which numbers Ernest de Weerth, Boris Aronson, and Jonel Jorgulesco among its entries. Today, still another generation is already knocking at the gates, with a promising record of accomplishment behind it in the colleges and little theatres in which it has served its apprenticeship.

There is no lack of designers upon which our theatre can rely for its stage settings. The lists are full, fuller, in fact, than the opportunities — the real opportunities for creative and distinguished work — which come to them. They may bring to the theatre the highest of high purposes, the most evocative of gifts and the most soaring hopes for beauty. But that is not enough, because the designer — like all the artists of the theatre — is not an independent figure, and scenery, no matter how inspirational it may be, cannot stand alone. It has no true or complete life without the play it backs and the actors it enfolds. It is but a part of the theatre's enticement, a secondary part which comes after, not before, the actor and the playwright. In particular, it is the playwright's vassal, waiting on him for its cue, even for its excuse for being, and deriving from his script both its form and style. The play is the written problem the scenic artist has been asked to solve in visual terms. Though we may measure the designer by the additions he may have made to the script, we judge him largely by the extent to which his work fits the particular play in question. The designer can be a one-style artist only at his own peril

and to the detriment of many of the plays he may be called upon to set.

"There can be no unity of style in mounting contemporary plays," Lee Simonson once said, writing on "Scenery and the Drama" in the *Atlantic Monthly,* "because there is little unity of style even in the work of a single contemporary playwright. Eugene O'Neill is typical of an age in which dramatists have almost as many methods as they have subjects, and change in swift succession from the colloquial idiom of sailors in stokeholds or water-front saloons to the heroic manner of traditional poetic verse and even mingle them in one and the same play. But whatever method the playwright may adopt, the setting of his stage is more important than ever. For in the theatre today the stage picture is nothing less than a form of literary expression." Scenery, continues Mr. Simonson, is to a modern audience, sitting before a modern play, the dramatization of a character's environment. "Hence the pictures on his walls, the furniture on which he sits, even the pattern of his wall paper, may speak to us as eloquently as any words — witness the stage directions of Bernard Shaw.... The furnishings of the modern stage are invariably something more than the traditional boards with a table and a few chairs, because the background of action is, in a very literal and concrete manner, written into plays so that the mechanics of action depend upon it. Any platform with a means of getting on and off will do for almost any comedy of Molière. But deliver the wrong set of scenery to almost any current play and the action cannot be made plausible enough to continue."

The rationality of Mr. Simonson's statement as to the scenic artist's style and function when serving the contemporary realistic playwright cannot be doubted. It leads

immediately to a second, sobering thought, which the idealists of the New Movement apparently never stopped to consider in the first white heat of their insurgency. To them there was but one kind of theatre. And that was the kind of theatre they were considering; the theatre that already seemed vital and alive to them because it lived so vitally in their own minds. They did not see that, in spite of their partisan scoldings and in spite of themselves, they were the servitors of the playwright, and that, as such, they were bound to be, in the large majority of cases, the servitors of the modern dramatist. If the designers did realize their inescapable dependence upon a playwright's whim, they frequently tried to dodge it by turning backwards to playwrights of their own selection.

If, however, they often looked backwards to the Classics, they had their reasons. It was not solely because the Classic dramatists were safely dead that the designers turned to them — as playwrights who were unable to protest against their scenery. Nor was it, as it has been suggested, merely because the older dramatists — the German Romanticists, the Elizabethans, and, more particularly, Shakespeare — gave them, by the very planning of their plays, more scenes to design than they could find in modern scripts that were "well-made." Instead, it was most frequently because they were compelled to look away from the present and back to the past in order to find dramatists who were sympathetic to their aims, and dramas that were cast in the same heroic moulds as were their own ambitions. To find mettle worthy of testing their talents, they turned their backs on the proscriptions of the factual present and sought comfort and release in the romantic, high-tensioned and poetic past.

All their backward glances, however, were bound to

be ineffectual in destroying the present they avoided. Naturally, they preferred the costumes, the pageantry, the colors, the symbolism and the opportunities for unbridled interpretation which abounded in these older plays, to the limited chances that everyday realism gave them. As artists they could not but rebel at the petty assignments they were handed in a repertorial and strictly photographic theatre — the hall bedrooms, the kitchens, and the water-front saloons in which contemporary characters battle for their destinies. They wanted palaces, idols, necklaces, frescoes and caparisons. And in the beginning their hope was stronger than their logic. They did not see as Mr. Simonson has since seen, that "realism must remain one necessary form of theatrical art, whether or not it is pictorially good or bad, ugly or beautiful, just as long as modern playwrights like Shaw and O'Neill use it as one method of arousing our emotions, and projecting ideas about the world we live in, which seem important enough to lure us to the theatre." They had the conviction — so common and so necessary to all insurgents — that with their victory the world would change, and that playwrights and audiences would fall into line with their dreams.

They did not stop to consider the justifications of realism, the æsthetic pleasures of which it is capable at its best, and the human pleasures it provides even at its worst. Feeling as artists a craving for style, for beauty, abstraction and self-expression, they were blind to the delights an audience can cull from such humble but natural pleasures as identifying themselves with what is happening on the stage and recognizing on its boards some of the objects with which they live outside of the playhouse. The scene designers did not stop to consider the theatre as an inevitable expression of their times, a major manifestation of

a scientific age, of a period of cold facts, expert reporting and "debunking." They only hoped — as artists — and sought for chances to bring their dreams to life. There were, of course, some modern playwrights and several manager-producers to feed their hopes. And, as the New Movement developed, there were phases in its growth which brought them into a happier contact with the present. Expressionism, for example, with its distorted, subjective backgrounds, its portrayal of mental states and points of view, its dalliance with the world of dreams and the subconscious, related them both to contemporary playwrights and to modern psychology. And Constructivism, with its naked outlines of an industrial age, its girders and cubicles, was a direct outgrowth of their own day. Regardless of the tags under which the designers' chances of escape presented themselves, they could not hide the fact that their ideals were eddies in the strong current of a realism which could not, would not, be suddenly diverted from its course.

They were a minority, these designers, blessed with the virtues of a minority. The theatre they envisaged was as real to them as the realistic theatre is real to its wider public. And those two theatres, of such divergent aims, were co-existent forms, each of which filled, in its own way, its own place satisfactorily. Of the two, in New York as well as in Europe, where "Neo-Realism" has recently appeared, it is, needless to say, the tradition of realism which has won. The realism which has triumphed, however, is a tempered, chastened realism; an example of the quiet conquest of the victor by the vanquished. It is realism simplified, purified and strengthened by the very doctrines of selection and design which the New Movement championed in a theatre that was to be avowedly anti-realistic. Its settings are the work, but not often the dreams, of the

scenic artists. The circumscribed opportunities they offer them may have forced the designers into doing work that amounts to little more than interior decoration of a doubtful rating. But it bears the stamp of the designer's skill and is watched for because of his name.

This tempered realism has no doubt served the realistic theatre well. It has given a certain style, even a certain beauty to the superficial dramas of everyday life. But the question arises — or is it merely a mirage?— which asks if this is enough, if there is not room for something more, and if the theatre is forever to be held down to what is the equivalent of repertorial prose. Surely it is not enough if it involves the extinction of the theatre's dreams, and of the glories — even the follies — of its more adventurous days. Surely it is not enough as a future for the theatre, if the dully accepting scenery of the moment is disregarded as scenery and considered only as a measuring-rod of the theatre's daring.

In its own beaver-board and canvas way, the current scenery is but an indication of the lack of protest in the contemporary theatre. It finds not only the theatre in general free of healthy discord, but the designers themselves indifferent to the trials of rebellion which once were theirs. Many of the designers seem satisfied with the compromise they have effected with realism, because, using a logic they would never have commanded in their younger, protestant days, their very leaders seem to have forsworn their hopes and faced the theatre as it is rather than as they might make it.

Today it is difficult to recapture the insurgency of the New Movement and the hot excitement it possessed for the few when it was really new. The battle cries of its campaigns are now as dead as only the slogan of victorious

causes can be. Triumph — though of an indirect, half-way sort — has robbed its battle cries and its shibboleths not only of their ring of novelty but also, in a measure, of the pressing reality they once held for those who cared. Partial triumph, or complete indifference, have stilled its watchwords into the platitudes of the modern theatre's æsthetic, in so far at least as it admits to an æsthetic at all. Now that many of its main objectives have been carried either by direct or indirect means, a lull seems to have overtaken the visual impetus of the New Movement. The beauty and the fervid desire for experimentation that once accompanied it seems momentarily to have been becalmed.

Today it runs, when it runs at all, a smoother, safer, more rational and more accepting course, conforms more to work-a-day standards (improved as they are by its own cleansing) and quietly controls its indignation and its protest. Its search for unfettering materials is not so active as it once was, nor are its gropings for new forms so constant or pronounced. A weariness or, if you will, a quality of common sense (the common sense, and the weariness too, behind all conformity) has overtaken many of the more established designers. Even some of the most distinguished of them, seemingly content to have the trials of insurrection over, have settled down to work of a pleasant, genteel, mildly distinguished but passive sort that is perhaps more amicable to their middle years. Or what is more significant, theirs is no longer a single, all-consuming allegiance, and they divide their energies between the theatre and the newly exploited "commercial arts," bought, as the philosophers and psychologists have been bought by advertising houses, to lend prestige, a "tone" to business. Apparently they now find a channel for their discontent, not in the theatre, but in window dressing, automobile designing and

textile decoration. Their loss to the theatre — even when partial — is particularly great at present, when of all times, the theatre stands in need of the active fires of rebellion, the inspiration of vital ideas, and the courage to transcend the matter-of-fact.

One way of measuring the discontent, even the importance of designers, is by scanning the double life open to all truly creative scenic artists: the life of fact, common sense and compromise into which the theatre may regiment them; and the unrestrained life of their imagination which they can live in their projects, their solitary dreams, their moments of escape into an ideal theatre of their own imagining. What is important to remember is that it is in this realm of the unreal, this world of projects, quite as much as in the hard world of facts that the future of the theatre lies.

The *Dante* project of Geddes and *The Cenci* sketches of Jones are non-existent in the playhouses of Broadway, but they are vital indications of attempts to go beyond its restraints. So, too, are Jo Mielziner's models for *Faust* and Donald Oenslager's projects for Wagner's *Ring* and Aristophanes' *The Birds,* which show that the younger designers are both eager and able to live in their dreams. All of these projects are uncommissioned, self-imposed labors. They may be impractical. They may never be realized. But they point to hopes, reachings out for a bolder theatre. They spring from discontent, an inner compulsion to state an ideal, a capacity for living beyond the present. They point to a will for dreaming and come from the nonconformity of which all vitality in every art is born. Scenery they may be. Just scenery, and not even scenery as yet. But they are really more than that. They are indications that

discontent is still alive, that there are ideals which must be stated. As projects they are hopes unrealized. But their chances of ever reaching realization depend first of all upon their having been hopes.

Robert Edmond Jones

"I WILL tell you why I have made these images of the theatre of other days," said Robert Edmond Jones, concluding a lecture delivered one summer at the University of California. "In all these dramas of the past there is a dream — an excitement, a high, rare mood, a conception of greatness. If you are to create in the theatre you must bring back this mood, this excitement, this dream. The plain truth is that life has become so crowded, so hurried, so ordinary, that we have lost the artist's approach to art. Without this, we are nothing. With this, everything is possible. Here it is, in these old dramas. See it. Learn it. Bring into the theatre a vision of what the theatre might be. There is no other way. Indeed, there is no other way."

It is as the man who has brought into the theatre a vision of what the theatre might be that Robert Edmond Jones has designed almost all of the productions which bear his name. His is the artist's approach to his art. He manages to capture in his settings the excitement, the high, rare mood, the conception of greatness indispensable to the creator in the theatre. What he puts before us is not the crowded, hurried, commonplace world in which we ordinarily live. His stage is no drab site for accurate reproductions, filled with the knick-knacks and the gew-gaws which clutter our daily life. It is a realm of his own creation, removed from all but the meaning of reality, where the backgrounds of life are simplified into significance. It is a place of essentials,

true to ideas rather than to facts, reflecting not reality but the shadows reality has cast upon the sensibilities of an artist. It is a world fashioned by Mr. Jones' invention, but intended for our dreams; high-tensioned, keyed to a quickened pulse, glamorous and rare, a "revelation and a release of the spiritual energies of the world made manifest in us."

It is to the theatre — not to life — that the sketches and the settings of Robert Edmond Jones admit their first allegiance. Charged with the theatre's enlargements, vibrant with its expectancy, they glory in their medium as a medium. In their lines, their colors, the distribution of their masses, their very scale, they proudly affirm they are not rooms such as you and I may live in, but backgrounds against which actors can act and a drama be unfolded. The moment the curtain rises on *Richard III, The Jest* or *Hamlet* as he has designed them, or when it reveals his settings for such realistic modern plays as *The House of Women, Paris Bound* or *Holiday,* we are aware that we have left mere mortality behind us. This work we face is not the slave of daily living or average thinking, nor does it see with the camera's illusionless eye. It is not cast in the cold, factual terms of prose, but possesses a kind of visual poetry of its own. We sense immediately that we are on the threshold of adventure, facing for a few brief hours a special world, subject to its own special values.

It may be the sinister outline of the Tower which hovers over his *Richard III,* the flight of steps surmounted by the great romanesque arch in his *Hamlet,* the gay way in which he translated the Pre-Raphaelites into theatre terms in *Patience,* the metallic background of mirrors which glittered as brilliantly as the lines of Congreve in his production of *Love for Love,* the madly satirical trappings with which he decked out *Serena Blandish,* or the naïve wood-

wings and cut-outs with which he established the mood of child-like innocence so necessary to *The Green Pastures.* But in each of them, though the semblance of reality is strong, it has been stripped of its details, relieved of its distractions, magnified in its essentials so that it takes on the meaning Mr. Jones desires us to read into it for the sake of the play and the performers.

The theatricality transcendent in Mr. Jones' work is held in check — and strengthened in almost every instance — by a taste unmatched among our designers. His are not the means of wilful self-exploitation. Instead they are balanced and reposeful, endowed in the case of his interiors with the graceful curves that belong to Mr. Jones' own chastened mixture of the baroque and the Victorian, and blessed at all times with a beauty of treatment that persists without regard for the squalor or the ugliness of the locale they may be asked to suggest.

Though Mr. Jones has been one of the most significant experimentors in our theatre, he has been peculiarly free of the faddist pitfalls which have engulfed so many of the lesser men. Of the changes and the fashions in the European theatre, Mr. Jones has been intimately aware. But his settings have never betrayed him into indulging in that expert foreign correspondence in scenery at which others among our designers excel. His work is informed by a more permanent standard of excellence than the passing European modes, whether they happen to be Expressionism of a 1923 Berlin or Munich model, or Constructivism of a 1929 Prague or Moscow body — the personal standards, in short, of a man who is an artist at the same time that he happens to be an artist of the theatre.

Mr. Jones' sketches, collected in a fine volume known as *Drawings for the Theatre,* are among the most exciting

products of the American theatre of our time. They record some of its bravest hopes and most palpitant dreams. Denied the actors they were intended to house, the plays they were made to back, his designs still manage to be able to stand alone — as designs that recreate on the pages of a book as few things ever do, the emotion that can be aroused by the theatre at its most evocative.

"The stage setting of an artist," wrote Arthur Hopkins in his introduction to these drawings, "never seeks to be a complete thing. It is a part of something infinite that trails on the ground but the part that opens vistas — glorious, grotesque, breathless vistas — that eye has never beheld and these are the vistas wherein the artist has found the essence, and if the artist and the beholder be blessed, the beholder finds it too."

If the beholder, sitting before one of the productions Mr. Jones has designed or looking at his collection of drawings, feels "blessed" it is because Mr. Jones, as Mr. Hopkins has pointed out, has the capacity of bringing to the theatre "visions awake in him that are asleep in us. He arouses our sleeping visions. He opens to us our untraversed possessions, new vistas within ourselves, our points of eternal contact."

Norman-Bel Geddes

SHORTLY before the New York production of *The Miracle* in which Norman-Bel Geddes was, as if by magic, to transform the vasty depths of the Century Theatre into a cathedral, Max Reinhardt wrote a foreword for the published version of Mr. Geddes' *Project for a Theatrical Presentation of Dante's Divine Comedy*, that most far-flung dream which has yet stirred the mind of an American designer.

It was a brief appreciation, this foreword that Reinhardt wrote. But a warmly admiring one, because there was something about the work of Geddes which had quickened the pulse of Reinhardt, even as it has frequently quickened the pulse of American theatre-goers; something above the ordinary which he could not fail to recognize as a power that refused to be cabined by the humdrum fears of earthlings, something lavish and aggressively individual, yes and something which was sufficiently massive, nay proudly solid, to have wrung from Reinhardt an enthusiastic "kolossal."

Little wonder, therefore, that in noting Geddes' bold, free architectural sense and the noisy, dauntless energy which is so regular a mark of his invention, Reinhardt should have hailed Geddes as "a master builder in the widest sense of the word," that he should have admired him as a designer who would have built cathedrals if he had lived in the middle ages, or that he should have described him as a rare combination of visionary and organizer, and prized him as a creator who draughts his own plans, places his own

bricks and mixes his own mortar. Little wonder, because in Geddes, Reinhardt had not only found an American possessed of those qualities which he happens to cherish most in Americans ("the inborn power, the natural pride, the childish delight to begin at the beginning, to discover the world anew, and with a clear comprehension to establish himself practically in it"), but he had also discovered a talent and a spirit which in more ways than one were very like his own. They were more chastened, to be sure, and more formal, but they were no less spectacular and, what is more to the point, they were sprung from the same roving and titanic restlessness.

Reinhardt could not but risk a prophecy about this Geddes, declaring in the rather cautious tones that are habitual in Delphi, "Blessed by the sun and the rain he will mature as the strongest man in the theatre of his time."

If Mr. Geddes has not matured as the strongest man in the theatre of his time — and to maintain that he has would be an impossibility — the fault lies quite as much with the special nature of his gifts as with the sun and rain. It lies with his gifts rather than with the all too indifferent elements because it is those very endowments which have elevated Mr. Geddes to the titan class that seem to have conspired to turn him into a kind of modern Prometheus, bound on the sidelines of our contemporary theatre.

Strength he has beyond question. And genius, too, of a self-assertive and "gloriously far-riding" sort which is as foreign to the work-a-day restraints of Broadway as it is fretful under them. But in spite of his power, or more probably because of it, Mr. Geddes remains a kind of noble outlaw among our designers. Indeed, in the most characteristic and unfettered expressions of his work, he seems to be less of a designer (in the accepted and accepting sense of the word)

than are any of our major scenic artists. He is lacking in their humility, their willingness to serve as secondary parts of a production.

To be sure in the backgrounds with which he has provided such routine musical comedies as *Erminie* and *Fifty Million Frenchmen,* or such varied plays as *The Truth About Blayds* and *The Devil in the Cheese,* he has shown not once but many times that he can, if only he is willing to, turn out settings that are in comfortable accord with the stated intentions of an author or a producer. But Mr. Geddes is neither at his best, nor at his most typical, in his moments of conformity. His is not a talent for reticent servitude, nor a gift for self-effacement. Instead it is a many-sided and militant genius that is too large and too defiant to be encompassed by the theatre as it is, just as it does not seem to be large enough to bring about the theatre of its own imagining.

When he is working for or by himself, and is therefore free to do his best rather than that "second best" which he condemns the theatre for asking him to do so continually, he is a virtuoso of the first magnitude. Then he discards realism for an abstract world of monolithic masses, and rears those finely impressive architectural or "sculptured" stages of his which have a solidity that makes them seem quarried rather than painted. Then, too, and this is more significant, he functions not only as a designer but also as a director. The play may be Mercedes D'Acosta's *Jehanne d'Arc,* or *The Divine Comedy* as Mr. Geddes has whipped it into dramatic form, or O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed,* or such an hilariously bawdy tract on feminism as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata.* Or it may even be such a quiet romantic comedy as Cloyd Head's and Eunice Tietjen's *Arabesque.* But when Mr. Geddes has finished with it one thing is certain and

that is the play will have lost its own identity and have been stamped with the indelible signature of Mr. Geddes' workmanship. He will have appropriated it rather than interpreted it, for he will not have been its subject half so much as he will have made it his.

The reason for this, of course, will have been the unbridled virtuosity of Mr. Geddes' genius, that virtuosity in fact which seems to make him rebel against limiting himself, or his sensing of his task, to so submissive a rôle as supplying the mood that a mere author may have called for in his play. He sees the play with which he deals as a director would see it. And like a director, Mr. Geddes dares to restate it as unhesitatingly in his own terms as Reinhardt (the much more practical Reinhardt) has restated almost all of the productions which have borne his name.

Sometimes — as in the Dante project and the models for *Lazarus Laughed* — Mr. Geddes' process of appropriation rather than interpretation succeeds to a degree that is matched only by the extent of its own daring. Occasionally, however, as in the sad case of *Arabesque,* which Mr. Geddes literally smothered with too much scenery, these audacious methods of Mr. Geddes' show how spurious their results can be. In the variations that they present of one form of permanent setting, these permanent stages of Mr. Geddes', which are permanent only for the one production for which they have been designed, betray with an embarrassing frankness how much greater is the relevancy they bear to the architectural forms, the blocks, that Mr. Geddes likes to toy with, than to the actual needs of the script upon which he may be working.

The setting for *Lysistrata* was a case in point. It had the impressive beauty and the calm strength that is common to all of his "sculptured" stages. Certainly there is no gain-

saying that it suggested the glory that was Greece in its own abstract way, because, bathed as it was in the burnt orange colors of a Grecian vase, it seemed dug from the soil of Athens. But its beauty had little or no connection with the script, and even less fitness for the humors of a rowdy farce-comedy. Indeed as it reared its steps and levels out of the orchestra pit, and sent them zig-zagging skyward like the real ascent to the Acropolis itself, it took on a solemn grandeur that was far more tragic than it was Aristophanic. In addition to its irrelevancy, its sense of existing for its own sake rather than of having been derived from one particular play and made especially for it, it was solidly built, expensively planned, with a lavishness, in fact an over-lavishness and a heedless extravagance, which was as unnecessary as it was unmindful of the truest needs of Aristophanes' text.

Both the self-assertive independence and the extravagance of Mr. Geddes' methods in *Lysistrata* are characteristic of his most striking work. And it is these characteristics of his which have made practical Broadway fear him as much as, if not more than, it admires him. They are qualities, to be sure, which have less than nothing to do with the amazing technical knowledge that Mr. Geddes commands, or with the brilliance of his ingenuity in solving the mechanical and interpretative problems which confronted him in such a production as *The Patriot*. They are qualities, too, which in no way challenge his importance as a visionary, though they do expose his limitations as a practical man in the everyday theatre.

It is only on Broadway, in the theatre of stern and repeated actualities, that these characteristics of Mr. Geddes' virtuosity have limited him, just as it is they which have kept him from maturing there as the strongest man

in the theatre of our time. For Mr. Geddes' strength is, paradoxically enough, his weakness. To which Mr. Geddes might respond, in the words of Celia in *Iolanthe,* "We know it's weakness, but the weakness is so strong."

Lee Simonson

As A designer Lee Simonson is a practical man, a craftsman not a dreamer, a doer not a theorist, who looks with a righteous disdain upon "the perennially advertised nostrums of scenic design." He is unimpressed by those not infrequent credos which have declared themselves for "nothing but costumes, nothing but light, no paint, nothing but flat decorative painting, not an atom of realism, realism *a l'outrance,* platforms, stairways, trestles, screens." Because, since the day in 1916 when a telephone call from Philip Moeller prompted him to become a scenic designer, and he walked on to the diminutive stage of the Band Box Theatre to try his hands at a setting for Andreyev's *Love of One's Neighbor,* Mr. Simonson has seen the designer's problem as "a pragmatic one" and not as a matter of dogma, of theory or preconception as to what the art of the theatre should or should not be.

He has his excellent reasons for feeling as he does, which he has set forth both in his article on "Scenery and the Drama" in the *Atlantic,* and in the chapter on "Setting the Stage" which he contributed to *The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years,* that volume Walter Prichard Eaton has compiled which not only includes the official record of the Six Little Directors of the Guild and How They Grew, but which also relates, in Mr. Eaton's vivid fashion, the way in which their theatre grew with them — in the space of a short ten years — into the most important producing organ-

ization that America boasts. In both of these essays Mr. Simonson expounds his own common-sensical theory of stage design, at the same time that he smiles over the empty beliefs of the faddists and the emptier annals of "the theatre's theologians," which have amused him by their mystical vanities and their transcendental paragraphs on stage design. In both of these essays, too, Mr. Simonson — who writes far better than most of those whose profession is writing about the theatre — states his own case so well, that it is best to let him speak for himself. Because in the polish of his sentences and the logic that lies behind them, there is a clean-cut rationality which is as characteristic of his settings as it is of his writing.

As a man who sees the theatre's first relationship to the life of its time and not to æsthetic abstractions, Mr. Simonson is not a little wearied at the incense burning which is daily done before the altar of Gordon Craig. "If designers had docilely accepted Gordon Craig's dogmas and turned scenery into uniform screenery," he contends, "their settings could never have had any relation to a living theatre." In the same way, and to almost the same extent, Mr. Simonson is irritated by the solitary divinity in which scenic artists are inclined to dress themselves. "We stage designers," he writes, "like to think of ourselves as so many Lochinvars trailing clouds of glory in pigment and colored lights behind us." And then he proceeds to rise up in his stirrups and to flay the Lochinvar myth with logic.

To Mr. Simonson the aim of scenic design is "to stimulate the kind of seeing which is believing." The fact that it does this mainly by its selection of significant detail, he does not deem to be as mysterious or as unique as the "theologians" have held. "The basic problem of scenic design," as he sees it is no more than "the truism which every worker in

the graphic arts accepts as his working hypothesis: the more one shows the less one reveals.... The problem has been summarized in Degas' dictum: You make a crowd with five people not with fifty: the problem of the suppression of unnecessary detail which any art student learns at his first life class while ostensibly trying to copy a nude model."

The impurity of the theatre as a medium is the fact as well as the factor which Mr. Simonson contends is bound to rob the designer's work of being "pure design." It is that, too, which makes it impossible for "theatrical art to be pure in the way that contemporary painting for a decade foolishly aspired to be." "There is no one way of designing any play," continues Mr. Simonson, "because there is no foreordained way of producing it.... Every age is our quarry, every manner our prerogative, every myth a challenge to reinterpretation. And none is seen by either the playwright or his audience from any single and accepted point of view, either moral, religious, or political." Accordingly, if the designer "approaches his problem realistically he will, I think, recognize at once that the choice of method and the problem of style, in the theatre of today, are entirely relative and the particular method chosen, in itself, unimportant."

The talk of realism as opposed to stylization, or stylization as opposed to realism, also seems specious to Mr. Simonson. Because, just as he believes that "there is no setting however symbolic or stylized that is not naturalistic or realistic in some of its details, due to the exigencies of the fact that the theatre does reproduce human action," so also, and for the same reason, he argues that "there is no setting however realistic or naturalistic in its details that can be completely so."

Having cleared the air of some of its æsthetic fogs, Mr. Simonson proceeds to outline the designer's task as it appears

to him. To begin with, he feels — as any sober theorist must be glad to admit — that instead of being a self-reliant art, scenery is but a part of something much bigger and more important than itself. Hence you do not find Mr. Simonson tempted — as Mr. Geddes is — to appropriate a play rather than interpret it. He wants his settings to fit the play, its acting needs and its director's wishes. And in almost all the many productions he has designed for the Theatre Guild — and out of it — he has succeeded in realizing his wish as an actuality.

The scenic artist's task is, as Mr. Simonson believes and practises it, a coöperative rather than self-assertive one. Or, as he phrases it, its incentive is "primarily the necessity of making the world of the play as real to an audience as it was to the playwright." For that very reason Mr. Simonson holds that the designer has been "most necessary in the theatres where the theme of the play was neither accepted nor obvious, where the picture of life it conveyed did not correspond to the pictures already in our heads."

Instead of speaking in praise of inspiration, or chanting the wonders of pure spirit ascending, Mr. Simonson has — since the day when he walked on to the stage of the Band Box as a novice — believed that he "faced the necessity of meeting a concrete predicament with as much imagination as possible." As a craftsman — indeed as an extraordinary technician and a decorative artist of high talents — he has kept his gifts and his ideas pliant, adjusted to the practical needs of each new production and subject to the temperament of the director with whom he has worked. "Had Moeller instead of Komisarjevsky directed *The Tidings Brought to Mary,*" points out Mr. Simonson, "the design for the unit setting would have been totally different in quality and effect. And the same would have held true if Komisar-

jevsky instead of Moeller had staged *R.U.R.* I could design the settings for the same play in succession for two different producers in two different types of theatres and the resulting designs would be totally different even though I started one set as soon as the other had gone to the carpenter's to be built."

Mr. Simonson is as generous in giving credit to the director as he is gifted in stating a play in terms of its production needs. "No producer that I have worked with," he writes, "has ever failed to design at least part of a production. The wheat field seen through the barn door of the last act of *The Power of Darkness* resulted from Emmanuel Reicher's plea that somewhere the beauty of the outside world must break in on the moment of redemption. Most of the structure of *He Who Gets Slapped* grew out of Robert Milton's insistence that he must have a post or a column somewhere near the center of the stage about which to build certain 'business.' The brain storm in *The Adding Machine* was the result of a remark of Moeller's—'If the whole scene could go mad, blood you know, something to show what's happening inside the man. . . .'"

It is not surprising to find that the man is not a dreamer who sees as clearly as Mr. Simonson does that "the most beautiful set of scenery can wreck a play if it takes five minutes too long to shift, or requires a weekly payroll that can very easily eat up any possible margin of profit." For such rationality as Mr. Simonson's is not the stuff out of which dreams are made. His concern is the thing to be done, and not the thing which may be done but which must in any case be stated. Accordingly, though you must look a long way—and then in vain—for his "etched intentions," his "sepia water colors" and his projects, you have only to

journey to the Guild and see a production which he has designed to enjoy one of his settings.

Having journeyed there — regardless of whether the play happens to be *The Faithful* or *Jane Clegg, Mr. Pim Passes By* or *Liliom, Back to Methuselah* or *Peer Gynt, The Devil's Disciple* or *Goat Song, Jaurez and Maximilian* or *Volpone, Marco Millions* or *Dynamo, The Apple Cart* or *Hotel Universe* — you can be sure of sitting before settings of uncommon interest, and uncommon beauty, too. They may make use of modernistic interiors, or consist of Japanese screens. They may be merely a series of cut-outs set against dark backgrounds and picked out by shafts of light. They may be rooms with walls but without ceilings; or a series of permanent arches in which the proper indications can be placed to suggest the glories of either the Orient or the Renaissance. Or they may include the towering girders of a power house, or the naked outlines of two Constructivist homes.

But in every case they are certain of being neat in their details, expert in their execution, and well-informed in their methods. In almost every case, too, they will look as clean as Spotless Town itself, and be warmed and brightened as only skilful lighting and oriental colors could make them bright and warm. They will have a decided distinction that is very much Mr. Simonson's own. And a constriction which is also apt to be his. But, though all of them will have virtues which are personal and by means of which they will reveal themselves as Mr. Simonson's work, they will indicate that he does indeed practise what he preaches. For they will show in each case that the play has been its own designer, and that each new predicament has been solved in the terms of its own logic.

4

Types of American Direction

AMONG Gordon Craig's dreams and hopes for the theatre was the coming of a superman. He was to be a superman indeed, because within the range of his individual talents were to lie all the separate arts and crafts which fuse to make a production. He would, as Mr. Craig imagined him, be able to write a play and manage it, act in it, take charge of its direction, invent what machinery or compose what music it might require, be responsible for its settings and costumes, and superintend its lighting. He was, in brief, to be a sort of glorified maid-of-all-work, the cook and the captain bold; a theatre unto himself. Whether he would also have been compelled to act as his own audience is another question.

As goes without saying, Mr. Craig's superman has not appeared and doubtless never will appear. But there is more to be said for him than that he is not with us, because his actual coming is not half so important as is the fact of his having once been dreamed of. He was not merely an idle child of prophecy. On the contrary he was as much an image of hope for the future as he was an expression of discontent

with the present, at once an ideal and an illustration.

Mr. Craig, as artists must, had been considering his medium of expression, the theatre. And as an artist he had found it wanting because of its scattered many-mindedness, because it was the result of "seven directors instead of one, and nine opinions instead of one." He saw it at its best, as many others have seen it, as an impure medium, lacking the directness of statement which was possible in the other arts. He felt its impurity to be fore-ordained because of all the people who tampered with one artist's original intention, altering or obscuring it, distorting or scrambling it, in order to effect that working compromise which a production represents. Each of these people, he argued, saw and hoped differently. And because of the variety of their ambitions and their dreams they could not but reduce the theatre to a round robin of mixed purposes which was misnamed an art. Little wonder, therefore, that Mr. Craig should have conjured up his vision of the superman from the depths of his disgust and hope. And less wonder that as an artist he should have concluded, "It is impossible for a work of art ever to be produced where more than one brain is permitted to direct, and if works of art are not seen in the theatre, this one reason is a sufficient one, though there are plenty more."

Though Mr. Craig's superman has not come to the theatre's assistance, the modern director has. His gifts are not the all-inclusive talents which blessed his Craigian prototype. When judged by Mr. Craig's ideal, he is but a compromise, the kind of compromise which dreams are ever destined to make with facts. Even as a compromise, however, he does much to aid in reducing the impurity of the theatre as a medium by bringing to it that one-ness of mind which had been denied it in the past.

So great has his importance been, particularly in Europe

where he is a much more virtuoso figure than he is in America, that Edith J. R. Isaacs can say in her collection of essays known as *Theatre,* "The feature by which the world theatre of this generation is chiefly distinguished is the rise of the director, not only as the coördinating, but also as one of the great creative factors in production. Twenty years ago, the director was an apologetic person whose business it was to evoke a harmony between an egotistic actor and a stubborn playwright. Tact and patience and humility were his chief requisites for success. Today he is the guiding, unfolding, unifying spirit in the theatre. The greatest men in the theatre today are all directors. Many of them have other theatric gifts — they are designers, too, or actors, or playwrights: but all of them have that sense of unity, of the theatre as an art which all the artists unite to serve, which most characterizes the trend of our production."

Although the modern director, like the designer, is a figure that is new to the theatre's history, his novelty lies not in the fundamentals of his tasks, but in the manner in which he has enlarged upon them and given them a fresh significance. His position in its humblest essentials is as old as the theatre itself and as the common-sensical need which created it.

In the theatre of the Greeks you find his duties divided between the archon and the choregus: the man who selected the poets who were to enter the dramatic festivals and distributed the actors among the poets he had chosen; and the man who picked the chorus for the different dramas that were to be acted. Even in the improvised theatre of the *Commedia dell'Arte* you discover him, and some of his attendant tasks, parading under such glamorous names as "il guido maestro," "il corago," "il concertatore" and "il capocomico." In the Paris of Molière you hear of him, listed as

the *premier garçon de théâtre,* and learn that he was a kind of stage manager, a subdirector, in charge of properties, held accountable for warning the actors of their approaching entrances, probably left in charge of some of the rehearsals when the chief actor or the author were away, and, in any event, responsible for the supernumeraries and for seeing that "all who appear before the public are decently dressed and wear proper shoes and stockings."

Then, and for many years to come both in Europe and America, he played but a secondary part in an actor's theatre, the theatre of "the dominant mime" as Mr. Simonson has dubbed it. Most generally he was an actor himself who managed his own "business" and took pains to manage it to his own advantage. He saw the play with which he dealt as something that was his, as a thing that he was free to deal with as he would, as a matter of a fat part in the midst of lean ones which he could further fatten by the manner in which he prepared his entrances, held his exits, cut his rival's lines, grouped his hirelings around him and compelled them to point their hands at him as if they were so many signposts on a bridle path and he another Daniel come to judgment.

Taking the same position on the stage that Brigham Young occupied at his dinner table, he did not worry much about the author's intention. He did not have to because the author's intention was usually something that he had given him. Whether he was Macready, corresponding with an author of the eminence Bulwer-Lytton enjoyed when he wrote *Richelieu,* or Forrest dealing with such an unknown mud horse as John Augustus Stone, the creator of *Metamora, the Last of the Wampanoags,* he treated the playwright in just about the same way. The actor-manager was the school master who not only taught the playwright how to write a

play but cracked him sharply over the knuckles when he failed to write it to fit his measurements.

Many of the actor-managers were as lavish in their productions as they were careful about their own performances. They found it practical to be so because, when the Nineteenth Century had dawned in England, and the horses at Astley's were drawing the crowds away from Drury Lane and Covent Garden, they discovered that the only way to compete with the circus men was to introduce circus elements into their own productions. From Kean on down to Tree, the habit of hippodroming the classics grew. But as it grew, and the emphasis steered increasingly away from the personal exhibitionism of the actor to his professional exhibitionism as a manager, it gradually became apparent that the rule of old-time actor-manager was done for.

His intentions had been good. But in making his productions more important than himself, he had been forced against his will into committing a kind of artistic hari-kari. The more elaborate his productions became, the more he had to depend upon his stage manager. And the more he depended upon his stage manager, the more self-reliant his stage manager became. Until one fine morning, by the roundabout process of dog-dog-bite-pig, the old-time actor-manager's authority went up in flames, and the stage manager arose from the ashes as the director that we now know.

He made his first important bow in the Europe of the Eighties when, under the autocratic rule of such a man as Kronek, the Saxe-Meiningen company revolutionized all theories of production by demonstrating the general merits of an excellent ensemble as opposed to the single excellence of the old star system. In the wake of Kronek came such men as Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko in Russia, Antoine in Paris, and Otto Brahm in Germany, devoting

themselves to Naturalism — spiritualized realism in the case of the Moscow Art Theatre — and the day of the great director was at hand.

Hot upon the heels of these all-important pioneers followed Reinhardt, Granville-Barker, Hevesi, Kvapil, Hilar, Meyerhold, Tairov, Andre, Lugné-Poë, Copeau, Pitoëff, Jouvet, Jessner, Weichert, Fehling, Piscator and the whole proud quota of virtuoso directors who have been — and in most cases still are — stamping the theatres of Europe with the aggressive marks of their own workmanship. They are men who have put the humility of their stage manager days behind them, figures who stand in the same relation to the plays that they produce that — to use an oft-used simile — the conductor of a great symphony orchestra stands to the scores that he interprets. Instead of seeing their job as a mere matter of putting music racks in place for other musicians to use, they have taken the baton into their own hands. And the result of their labors is as personal as are the different readings that a Toscanini and a Stokowski can give to the identical symphony of Beethoven.

They feel as free to make a play their own as ever an actor-manager did. But where they differ from him is that in appropriating it, they appropriate it as a play and not as a part. Like the designers of the New Movement, these directors, who have led it and whose leadership has been the history of its scenery, have achieved many of their most notable results with plays that belong to other ages than their own. To them, as to the designers, the classics have given opportunities which the majority of contemporary plays do not hold. And the freer the manner of the old play has been, the bolder have their own methods been in handling it.

In the classics, Europe's virtuoso directors have wel-

comed a challenge of a special kind. For the problem they faced when producing a classic drama has been a double one. Not only have they had to state the play in the terms of the theatre, as all directors must when transferring modern scripts to the stage, but they have also sought to restate it in the terms of audiences that are far removed from it in time. To succeed in doing this they have smothered their awe for the great dramas of the past, and deliberately set about to revitalize them in production so that none of their greatness would be lost in the theatre of the present. Holding vitality to be a more valuable theatrical asset than classroom reverence, they have cast tradition to the winds and discarded the archæology that was so dear to the actor-managers for a freehanded stylization that is very much their own. In many respects the greatness, to say nothing of the conviction, of their breaks with tradition has been the measure of their own importance.

As the men in high command, if not as autocrats, though usually as both, it is these directors who have marshalled all the forces of the theatre under them. It is they and not their actors who have been responsible for the interpretation of a part because the essence of their leadership lies in the fact that it is they who are responsible for every feature that combines to make their productions what they are. Their general responsibility is not only the symbol of their authority. It is also the symbol of the rights they have asserted as interpreters of supreme importance and the oneness of mind which they have brought to the theatre as the over-lords of their productions.

Though in America we have no virtuosi of the kind that Europe boasts, our directors are not lacking in their powers. They may be managers, such as Winthrop Ames, Arthur Hopkins and Jed Harris who have theatres of their

own, or men such as Guthrie McClintic, George Abbott and Marc Connelly who are free-lance directors. But the script is in their hands. The selection and training of the actors is in their care. The designer's sketches are subject to their approval. And the general responsibility for the details of the entire production is theirs.

They give the play its pace, aid in the reading of particular lines, plan the "business," arrange the groupings and, in varying degrees, are held accountable for the interpretation. It is their duty to cover the weaknesses in a script and to make its good points clear. They may even have a hand in its rewriting, for few scripts are in their final form at a first rehearsal. In all of their capacities, and in more ways than one, directors are critics in action; constructive critics who make their comments before the opening of a play instead of after it, critics whose opinions find expression in deeds rather than in print, who work with people as well as with ideas.

The direction encountered in our theatre is of many kinds. It ranges from the painstaking love of detail and the infinite patience of Mr. Belasco's work to the less certain but far more imaginative contribution of such a man as Mr. Hopkins. It includes such skilful but unobtrusive practitioners as Guthrie McClintic, Chester Erskin, Gilbert Miller, Dudley Digges and Philip Moeller (whose solution of the monumental difficulties presented by *Strange Interlude* was particularly distinguished). It numbers such canny showmen as the Three Georges, Mr. Cohan, Mr. Abbott, and Mr. Kaufman, whose mastery of tempo and pace is among the most marked of their characteristics. In Jed Harris it finds a young producer whose style is even now changing from the jubilant toughness of *Broadway* and *The Front Page* to the fine sensitivity he has recently shown in his direction of

Uncle Vanya, and whose future augurs well for the American theatre. In Rouben Mamoulian, identified most particularly by *Porgy* and *Marco Millions,* it discovers a young man whose gift in handling crowds and giving a visual pattern to his productions is as real as it is rare. And in Mr. Geddes it lists a director who dreams in terms of a larger showmanship even if he cannot quite succeed in making his dreams materialize. In short, the touch of our directors is varied, even if their virtuosity is small.

It is in the scope of their ambitions rather than in the limits of their power that our American directors differ from their European contemporaries. Their talents are of a lesser kind, and their originality less marked. Unlike the directors who dominate the stages of the continent they feel their first duty is the intention of the author rather than the interpretation they may bring to it. Working most generally in the terms of the repertorial plays with which they daily deal, and working with their authors at their elbows, they are transmitters rather than creators, preservers rather than interpreters. Even so, in the less aggressive way that is theirs, they have put their mark upon our theatre, teaching us to realize that, however different the case may be in the library, in the modern theatre the play is no longer the thing. But the production is, for it is that which makes or breaks the play.

David Belasco

It is as "The Wizard" that he is known, this white-haired clerico of our theatre, who is given to reversing his collar, dressing like an abbé, and having his pictures taken with his head and one hand in meditative conjunction. And in his own way, and within the special limits of his necromancy, he has unquestionably earned his title, if for no other reason than because he is, as the dictionary would say, a "person who effects impossibilities." Among these none is more startling than the manner in which he has become by reputation the foremost realist of the American theatre, in spite of his having shown again and again in practise how genuine is his preference for what might mildly be identified as spangles and the Big Tent.

His realism as a director is largely a matter of externals, of so filling the eyes of his audiences with actuality that they are seduced into believing that what happens on his stage is as actual as what it happens in. By employing real stairs, a desk as cluttered as any man's might be, pancakes as weighty as most pancakes are, and a restaurant which is a glistening reproduction of Childs, he makes of scenery not the background but the authority for the action it contains. Thus it is that Mr. Belasco, the director, offers Mr. Belasco, the playwright and adaptor, real, everyday clothes for his wax works. And in this documentation of his melodramas, he spares himself neither pains nor expense. Tales of the trouble to which he goes have, in fact, grown into a legend

and are an important part of the Belasco myth. Read him when he speaks on the typewriter of Louis Defoe in the highly vacuous book of his known as *The Theatre Through Its Stage Door,* and you will find his own chronicle of his habit of collecting scenery.

"My explorations in search of stage equipment," he writes, "are really the most interesting parts of my work. I attend auction sales and haunt antique shops, hunting for the things I want. I rummage in stores of the richest as well as the poorest sections of New York. Many of the properties must be especially made, and it has even happened that I have been compelled to send agents abroad to find exactly the things I need. For instance, I sent an agent to Bath, England, to buy all of the principal properties for *Sweet Kitty Bellairs.* It was necessary, also, to send to Paris to obtain many of the objects which fitted into the period of *Du Barry.* I purchased the old Dutch furniture I used in *The Return of Peter Grimm* fully two years before I had put the finishing touches on the writing of that play, and most of the Oriental paraphernalia of *The Darling of the Gods* I imported from Japan."

The limits to which he can carry this method of assembling his scenery — of buying realism wholesale or retail in the auction rooms — are shown in Mr. Belasco's account of how he acquired the "exact counterpart of a little hall bedroom in a cheap theatrical boarding-house in New York," which was needed for Eugene Walter's *The Easiest Way,* one of the more worthy plays that Mr. Belasco has produced. "I went," he says, "to the meanest theatrical lodging-house I could find in the Tenderloin district and bought the entire interior of one of its most dilapidated rooms — patched furniture, threadbare carpet, tarnished and broken

gas-fixtures, tumble-down cupboards, dingy doors and window-casings, and even the faded paper on the walls."

Through that same book — and throughout his life, too — Mr. Belasco's credit lines to nature have been generous and profuse. "I fear I have been applauded more than I deserved," he writes, mentioning the varying sunlights he cast upon *The Girl of the Golden West, The Darling of the Gods* and *Marie-Odile,* "for it is not I who dictated their light effects, but nature. All I had to do was to go to nature for my inspiration and ideas, and then find a way to reproduce accurately nature's phenomenon on my stage." And there it is his realism ends — a matter of auction rooms, faded wall paper bought from landladies in the Tenderloin and sunsets accurately reproduced upon his stage; a knack, really a genius, for finding the right things and knowing what the right things are; and an unmatched gift for patience, foresight and myth-building.

But because Mr. Belasco dresses his plays realistically it is no more to be concluded that he is a thoroughgoing realist, than it can be assumed he is a priest because he dresses himself in black and is fond of buttoning his collar in back. Nor do all of his bows to nature imply that he is at heart a Naturalist. That he is true to his sunsets and skilful in reproducing them, no one could deny. But the final test of the realist is not what he does to nature on his stage, but what he does to human nature. Though as a director, Mr. Belasco may send to Japan for his paraphernalia, or travel to California for his sunsets, he does not go much further than the redoubtable Dion Boucicault for his documentation of human nature. At least he does not go further than Augustus Thomas. Thus it is that Mr. Belasco leads a strangely double life in the theatre, and is, as far as realism is concerned, a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, producing

in one tradition, and writing, adapting and picking his scripts in another. And thus it is, too, that the major significance of his work is as a transitional figure. Like Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero, those other transitionals whom he closely resembles, he belongs to two periods at once. Like Jones, in particular, he is dogged by "the dull devil of melodrama," even though he thinks of himself — and is thought of by his public — as another Antoine come to judgment.

In his own eyes, however, he is the anointed defender of the faith. He feels called upon to attack Gordon Craig, who according to Mr. Belasco, "has accomplished little more than to ventilate his fantastic theories in an inexplicable book, entitled *On the Art of the Theatre.*" He feels compelled to damn the so-called New Movement as a mob-gatherer similar to a "five-legged calf"; and to rail at the experimentors who argue, as he puts it, "that a few violent splotches of green upon a drapery can better express to an audience an idea of a forest than the actual reproduction in painting." And the sincerity of his viewpoint is above dispute. But behind that sincerity lurks a paradox, one of those "seeming impossibilities" which Mr. Belasco, the Wizard, alone is able to effect. It is the paradox of the man who, though he is certain that "when you distort reality you have destroyed truth" and who, though he considers the chief work of his life to be the manner in which he has brought the stage and nature into a closer harmony, has yet produced in his theatres — to choose only from the productions of his later years — such plays as *The Harem, Ladies of the Evening, Kiki, The Bachelor Father, The Son-Daughter, The Dove, Lulu Belle, It's a Wise Child* and *Dancing Partner* — plays that are, in spite of all they may have offered in the way of general amusement, as tricked and

undistinguished and divorced from truth as any that have ever graced the record of a distinguished manager-producer, who happens at the same time to be an arch-champion of photographic realism.

To appraise the character of Mr. Belasco's realism one has only to compare it with the work of some of the truly first-rate realistic directors of the modern theatre. Measured by Stanislavsky's standards, to name only one example, Mr. Belasco's is not realism at all. It is ingenious and remarkably efficient as far as it goes, marked by a superficial style which has become known as "the Belasco method," and more thorough in its perfection of external details than is the work of any American director. But it gets no further than the vestibule and is empty with a resounding emptiness. To realize the extent of that emptiness, to see how mechanically expert but spiritually shallow are its means and aims, merely place a copy of *The Theatre Through Its Stage Door* side by side with that most searching of theatrical autobiographies — Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art.* In a moment, a sorry moment for patriotic pride, you sense the difference between the genuine and the paste; the true titan and adroit technician; the man who is the complete realist, probing and uncompromising, and the satyr who is one-third realist and two-thirds showman.

You sense, too, the skill, the real wizardry of Mr. Belasco's showmanship. You begin to understand his patience, that unflagging patience of his out of which he has developed his actors — his Mrs. Leslie Carters, his David Warfields and his Frances Starrs; that patience which has made him a master in finishing his productions, and altering and rewriting his scripts until they satisfy his sense of theatre. You realize how completely he is the child of romance and of melodrama, but how shrewd he is in ap-

praising the tastes of the American public. It is their hearts at which he frankly aims, and their patronage which he courts with an identical frankness. He knows how much of tragedy, plain-speaking or fact-facing they will stand. He knows that in the popular theatre they seek escapes from life, even though they like to believe that in these escapes they are being confronted with life itself. He is aware, too, of how far this public, with its Puritan background, will follow him in his audacities, those favorite plots of his which deal with the tawdry woes of bad ladies, past and present and regardless of color. "Whenever I rehearse a situation of passion, of crime, of wrong-doing," he wrote in a passage that infuriated the moral William Winter in his fat, fat *Life of David Belasco,* "I remember the heart. I make an excuse — seek out the motive, to put the actor in touch with the culprit's point of view. The excuse is always there." And it is in that excuse that his public finds its own for flocking to his houses to see his Zazas, his Du Barrys, his Kikis, and his Lulu Belles.

As a showman, Mr. Belasco commands a thousand tricks by which he can fake a play, a scene, a moment, into a kind of bedizened effectiveness; tricks he has gained from his long experience in the theatre; shrewd, common sense tricks by which he betrays the authority — and the vintage — of his direction as surely as an older actor reveals the vintage and the authority of his acting by the manner in which he makes an entrance or steals a scene from a stage full of novices. For all his surface coating of actuality, Mr. Belasco's productions are at their best in their sawdust moments — when they are making their points, drumming melodrama to a high intensity, employing strong, unshaded colors; or dealing in the obvious methods of a stalwart, if old-fashioned, showmanship. They are essentially "theatric,"

intended to gain approving "ahs," devised to twist the spine or tear the heart and win instantaneous applause. They are calculated, too, to make the calculation which has gone into them one of their strongest "points," and bear the unmistakable imprint of Mr. Belasco's own hand, his cunning and his planning.

Mr. Belasco knows, for example, what scenes should or should not be played in strong lights. He card-catalogues the human passions with the corresponding color values, and is inventive in finding excuses to shift his lighting according to his intuitive understanding of what is needed to give a scene greater carrying value out front. With his lights, as with most of his technical devices, he has played the rôle of innovator on the American stage; experimenting with them, banishing footlights from his theatres, and installing new apparatus for overhead and side lighting that was little short of revolutionary in its time. He has done this not only to achieve his aims in scenic realism but because as a far-sighted man of the theatre he had the sense to see, when most of his American competitors were blind to their importance, that "lights are to drama what music is to the lyrics of a song."

The very fact, however, that Mr. Belasco was able to gain the reputation of a realist is not without significance. More than anything else, his reputation makes clear the condition of our stage when he first emerged as a director. It indicates what card-board houses he was compelled to destroy before he could set about rebuilding them in more solid materials. That he did destroy them and inaugurated a new tradition, without which the production methods of our modern theatre would have been impossible, is a matter of record, as is the deep indebtedness most of our present-day directors owe, directly or indirectly, to Mr. Belasco.

As a technician he has been one of the great influences of our stage, as well as one of its great pathfinders, and it is in his laboratories that he has shown his greatest courage. But, as is the sad fate of the leaders of new tendencies, the times have passed beyond him for the definite well-being of our theatre. At best his has been a limited tradition, methodical but unimaginative. Even in its own way it has been made to serve as a prop for mediocrity too constantly to achieve the full importance that might otherwise have been its lot. It has been circumscribed by its lack of daring. And, as the years have slipped by, it has become increasingly clear that, in spite of Mr. Belasco's fidelity to realism and his fondness for truth, his first allegiance has been neither to truth nor realism, but to what he thought his audiences would accept as truth. Accordingly, he has been more realistic about his box office than he has ever been on his stage.

Winthrop Ames

In a theatre that is as freely given to the tastes and standards of the under-groundlings as our own is, it is always a relief to sit before the productions of Winthrop Ames. It is a relief because there is an air of undisguised good breeding about every production which leaves his hands, a feeling of something that has been sensitively dealt with and politely stated. It may be A. A. Milne's *The Truth About Blayds* that he has mounted, or such plays from the respectable pen of John Galsworthy as *Escape* and *Old English.* It may be such an allegory as *The Betrothal,* such a melodrama as *The Green Goddess,* or such a rollicking satire as *White Wings.* It may indeed be *Iolanthe, The Mikado* or *The Pirates of Penzance,* or even such an ill-mannered play as Mr. William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice.* But by the time that Mr. Ames has stated it in the terms of his meticulous direction, it can be counted upon to have acquired — in spite of the patent differences which may distinguish it from the others — a gentility that is characteristic of them all.

It is as if Titipu, Merry England, fairyland, modern America and Venice's Rialto had all been sent to the same finishing school. They are diamonds still, but no longer in the rough. When they graduate into an Ames production, they have learned their manners, and read from the same book of etiquette. They are modulated and polished, refined, easeful and engaging. They are well groomed in every

detail, dressed — and stressed — with a fine mastery of unobtrusive shadings. They have gained subtlety as well as poise; carriage as well as refinement. Gone are their hoydenish ways and forgotten are the crudities of their youth. They have the flavor of thick carpets and marquetry about them, not of tanbark. For they are the reposeful exhibits of that leisure which is the mainstay of all the aristocratic virtues.

Like the true aristocrats they really are, they have a way of hiding the work which has gone into them, or making it seem to be the most trifling task of love. In this respect they show even more markedly than they do in others how Mr. Ames has deviated from the methods that are dear to most directors. For the majority of directors, instead of being ashamed to have their productions caught wearing their aprons in public, are inclined to glory in their labors, expecting democratic audiences to value them all the more for the honest toil they strive to make so manifest. Not so Mr. Ames whose productions not only give the impression of effortless ease, but also of having been the most delightful good fun to make. They are witty, too; as witty as they are urbane. And they are impeccable in their taste; made for, and dear to, that section of the public which was once identified as "the carriage trade," a section of the public, incidentally, whose preferences are all too rarely considered along Broadway.

Mr. Ames' productions possess a fragile, nebulous beauty — the kind of Dresden loveliness he gave us in *A Kiss in Zanadu,* that ballet which was tucked into such a fantastic comedy as *The Beggar on Horseback*. They evince, as his Gilbert and Sullivan revivals generously indicated, a charming sense of color combinations, and an intuitive awareness of compositional values. His groupings are fluidity itself.

They fairly melt into each other, filling the eye for a second, then dissolving to take another form, but fitting all the while into his general scheme. They make their dramatic points, of course, but not in the regulation way. There, too, they are well-mannered; scorning the obvious, dodging any vulgar display which might call attention to themselves, and preserving — even while they are making their contributions — the anonymous correctness of good breeding.

The most ebullient of high spirits may, and often does, mark Mr. Ames' productions. But their comedy never slips beyond control, never surrenders to the sheer animal exuberance of which rowdy farce is made. Theirs is sophisticated fun, expertly observed and delicately displayed. They are witty rather than humorous, inviting the quick, delicious merriment of intellectual appreciation, but never evoking a broad guffaw. Almost always they are deft, inventive and ingenious; and spared from the blights of heavy-handedness.

Occasionally, as in *The Mikado,* their gaiety loses something of its verve by being over-fussy, by becoming lost in the minutiæ of comic byplay which is so frankly business for the sake of business, that — delightful and precise as it may be — it cannot but curtail its own spontaneity by betraying the studied artlessness which lies behind it. Occasionally, too, as in the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice,* when the speeches of Portia and Shylock were played against a background of squirming supernumeraries, Mr. Ames is tempted to sacrifice dramatic values to pictorial effects. But on the whole his productions are as sure in their dramatic statement as they are certain in their genteel repression.

Always, however, they are executed with unimpeachable taste — held up as well as down by their aristocratic niceties. What they gain in understatement, in the unbroken

suavity of their self-possession, they lose, of course, in impetuosity, and in that rougher strength which is mothered by the simpler virtues. If they are lacking — as undoubtedly they are — in a broad, free expansiveness, and are as deficient in their raw strength as they are circumscribed in their imaginative play, it is because they seem forever mindful of the conventions of their class. Its inhibitions are their own as surely as are its taboos, which, while they have their special glories, admit their special limitations, too.

It is not that Mr. Ames' productions are cold or negative in their sympathetic values. Because they are in truth warmly comprehending. But they are undemonstrative, embarrassed, as it were, in the face of "scenes" or emotions that are unbridled; embarrassed, too, by confessing too much ambition, or by stooping to what is implied by "showmanship." Of reckless, headlong passion they offer as little as they do of peasant sturdiness or hardy Gargantuan laughter. They take few desperate chances and are fired by no bold spirit of rebellion. Yet they seem self-assured without being smug, and traditional without being stuffy. In reality, they are conservative, in the best sense of the word. Exploration is not half so much their affair as is the cultivation of the lands which are already known. But in the perfection they bring to those estates which they do include, they seem to their rivals on Broadway as a formal garden does to nature.

They are what they are: true to themselves and their own standards. And that is much more than can be said of nine-tenths of the productions made in our theatre. To quarrel with them for not being more than what they are would be as silly as it would be to be exasperated with Gainsborough because he was not Rubens, or to be cross with Lord Chesterfield because he did not write like Ernest Hemingway. Better by far, in a world that has boasted so few of

them, to be grateful for the Gainsboroughs, the Chesterfields and the Ameses, and sense the special distinction of their style, even while being thankful for the theatre's sake that theirs is not the only one.

Arthur Hopkins

The productions of Arthur Hopkins indicate that as a director he is not unlike the little girl with a curl in the middle of her forehead. They are very, very good or pretty, pretty bad, even if they are not horrid. Either they are as glamorous as only he can make them or as flat as only he occasionally permits them to make themselves. But almost always they are certain to effect no compromise between being right and being wrong.

Behind both their virtues and their faults lies a definite theory of production which is very much Mr. Hopkins' own. It is a dangerous theory when it fails and an excellent one when it succeeds; a theatrical policy of *laissez-faire* that, as its results show, finds Mr. Hopkins as willing as was Brand to pin his faith to the ideal of "all or nothing." It is a theory that is as far removed from the paternalism of the autocratic directors as the teaching of Meiklejohn is from the bullying of a Squeers. It puts self-effacement in the place of self-assertion and prides itself on "guiding the ship by wireless" instead of delighting in those audible flourishes of the whip by means of which many directors stamp a production as theirs.

This theory of Mr. Hopkins is not without a name. Indeed it travels under such a high-flown label as "Unconscious Projection"; a phrase of his, by the way, which is as frank in its admission of the practical difficulties of the theory as it is clear in distinguishing Mr. Hopkins' mind

from the minds of many of his contemporary directors. It is a theory which was first enunciated some eleven years ago in a slim volume of Mr. Hopkins' authorship called *How's Your Second Act?,* a volume incidentally that was as undotted with the "I's" of a shadow writer as it was unrelated to its title.

When he came to write this statement of his directing creed, Mr. Hopkins had not yet made those productions of *Redemption, The Jest, Richard III* and *Hamlet* for which Robert Edmond Jones was to design some of his most memorable backgrounds and in which John Barrymore was to emerge for a few palpitant years (before he took to being a profile in Hollywood) as the most exciting and hopeful acting talent of his time. The brave but disastrous *Macbeth* production, in which the too, too solid flesh of Lionel Barrymore found itself firmly planted before the diaphanous abstractions of Jones' scenery, was still in the hazy limbo of the future. So, too, of course, were such productions as *Samson and Delilah, Anna Christie, What Price Glory?, Machinal, Burlesque, Holiday, The Commodore Marries* and *Torch Song.*

Even then, however, Mr. Hopkins had already struck a new note in American direction and was being hailed enthusiastically by no less enthusiastic a "hailer" than George Jean Nathan as a man who had "already fulfilled his promise." For his days as a reporter and a vaudeville booking agent were behind him. As a practical idealist he had already stormed New York, and, in such productions as *The Devil's Garden, The Poor Little Rich Girl, Good Gracious Annabelle, On Trial,* and *The Successful Calamity* had even then made clear that he was a force to be reckoned with.

It was then that Mr. Hopkins penned his theory of "Unconscious Projection," a theory of direction that is as

applicable to his later work as it was to his earlier. Mr. Hopkins looked at the American stage as he found it and arrived at his own conclusions as to where and why it was ailing. They were, needless to say, conclusions which had little in common with either the precept or practise of such an astute showman of the older school as David Belasco. "From the very beginning," he declared, "I had an abhorrence of all that is generally termed theatric. It seemed cheap and tawdry, the trick of a street fakir." He saw the faults of the older school plainly and stated them unhesitatingly, "the prepared exits, the speeches at the door, the exits laughing, exits sobbing, exits hesitating, the standing in the doorways to watch some one off so that any applause they may receive will not be interfered with." He realized that "the whole difficulty can be traced to one source, trying to make good instead of trying to be good." And his plea was for simplicity. "Honesty! Honesty! Honesty! That is all we want. Do things as they should be done and let the results take care of themselves."

Then he came to his theory. "Briefly, the basis of the theory is this," he wrote, "complete illusion has to do entirely with the unconscious mind. Except in the case of certain intellectual plays the theatre is wholly concerned with the unconscious mind of the audience. The conscious mind should play no part. The theatre is always seeking unanimous reaction. It is palpably evident that unanimous reaction from conscious minds is practically impossible.... In the theatre I do not want the emotion that rises out of thought, but the thought that rises out of emotion." Mentioning the hypnotist and his methods of stilling the conscious mind, Mr. Hopkins continued, "In the theatre we can secure a similar result by giving the audience no reason to think about it, by presenting every phase so unobtrusively,

so free from confusing gesture, movement and emphasis, that all passing action seems inevitable, so that we are never challenged or consciously asked why."

The success of the theory as Mr. Hopkins realized rests upon the precarious assumption that each person connected with a production is able — and willing — to make "a complete surrender of selfishness." "Each must make himself a free, transparent medium through which the whole flows easily and without obstruction. No one at any moment can say, 'Ah, this moment is mine! I shall show what can be done with it.'"

In the light of his theory it is doubly interesting to hear Mr. Hopkins outline his own method of work. "It is always my aim," he declares, "to get a play completely prepared without anyone realizing just how it was done.... The first step in unselfishness must be taken by me. I must renounce at the outset all temptation to be conspicuous in direction, to issue commands, to show how well I can read a line or play a scene, or slam a door; to ridicule or get laughs at the confused actor's expense. I must renounce all desire to be the boss, the great master, or the all-knowing one. I must guide the ship by wireless instead of attempting to drag it through the water after me. There are any number of actors who have been with me who firmly believe that they receive practically no direction, and that is exactly as it should be....

"I am opposed to the old method of marking out the 'business' in advance, because at the outset it confines the movement and tends to a fixity that hampers free flow. The first two or three times through an act I let the actors roam about the scene and invariably the 'business' solves itself.... Automatically all falseness of movement is denied admission, all crosses, dropping down stage, falling up stage,

exchanging chairs, circling pianos, wrestling with furniture, and all the strange conduct that directors of past years have relied upon to keep actors busy." Mr. Hopkins wants the emotion felt rather than faked. He wants "the unconscious of the actors" to talk directly to "the unconscious of the audience" without the interference of conscious devices. Accordingly he eliminates, "all gesture that is not absolutely needed, all unnecessary inflection and intonings, the tossing of heads, the flickering of fans and kerchiefs, the tapping of feet, drumming of fingers, swinging of legs, pressing of brows, holding of hearts, curling of moustaches, stroking of beards, and all the million and one tricks that have crept into the actor's bag, betraying," as he sees it, "one of two things — an annoying lack of repose, or an attempt to attract attention to himself and away from the play."

Such in its barest outline is Mr. Hopkins' theory of "Unconscious Projection." It is a matter of respecting the "individuality" of a play instead of exploiting it as a vehicle; of seeing "only one thing made of ten or twenty parts that is moving"; of being "totally unconscious of its parts . . . so long as it moves properly"; and of measuring the excellence of these parts by the manner in which they elude individual attention rather than by the way in which they invite it. It is the Physician's Aphorism applied to the theatre, the aphorism that Carlyle stated years ago in *Characteristics* as "the first condition of complete health is that each organ performs its functions unconsciously, unheeded."

The wonder of Mr. Hopkins' theory is not that it fails but that it succeeds at all. It requires actors who can be unselfish, who have no need of the regulation tricks of their trade, and who are good enough actors to get along without tangible direction. If, to survive this process of "guiding the ship by wireless," the actors must be good ones, so must the

play be good that Mr. Hopkins is producing. It must be as free of tricks — those heart-claspings and those brow-pressings that are as common to playwrights as they are to actors — as is Mr. Hopkins' cast or Mr. Hopkins himself.

For this very reason Mr. Hopkins' productions frequently present the paradox of being weakest in those very scenes at which the ordinary showman would excel. They betray his own abhorrence of the theatric by faltering when they reach theatrical moments that must be artificial to succeed. Their crescendos and their climaxes are often weak, their transitions blurred and their "points" obscure, when a single word from him would have set them right. His theory makes him happiest when the play with which he deals is so genuine in its writing that it needs no conscious devices to project it. When, on the other hand, a script suffers from obvious ills that any director could cure, he ignores them as completely as if he were a Christian Scientist whose daughter had the measles.

His method makes him a fine conserver of a play's integrity but a pitiless, if unwilling, expositor of its weaknesses and falsities, as was the case in *Half Gods, First Flight, The Buccaneer, These Days,* and any number of his other failures. Unlike Mr. Belasco, he has shown no special aptitude for rouging a script until it seems to possess the colors of life. Nor does he, like George M. Cohan or Jed Harris, control the slave-driver's lash by means of which a limping script can be sent running at such a pace that no one has time to consider its shortcomings. Even with a good play one misses in Mr. Hopkins' productions the kind of precise ordering that is the virtue of a more positive and autocratic dominion in the theatre. With the good plays as with the bad, one often senses an indecision that is due to no uncertainty on Mr. Hopkins' part but to the uncertainty of

the elements over which his theory has no control. For, like all theories, his is one that either works or does not work. But where his differs from the other theories of direction is that when it works it works astonishingly well, and when it fails it fails because Mr. Hopkins has refused to resort to any of those easy means of artificial respiration which another director would have rushed to its aid.

His standards, like his theories, are highly personal. It is for that reason that he shows an indifference to established names and a hospitality to untried talents that is rare on Broadway. The decisions he must make as "the censor" of a production, those all-important decisions in selecting his plays and determining the manner in which they should be done, are not made because of what he thinks "will go." He looks within himself, asking himself only if he likes it, not if the town may like it. And if he likes it that is all there is to it. He may be right; he may be wrong. But he comes through his triumphs and his failures — and he has had many of both — with the reassuring knowledge that he has satisfied himself. "Why do I choose certain plays for production?" he once wrote in the *Theatre Magazine*. "For the simplest of all reasons. I like them. And if I like them I have no further choice. I must do it. I become its suitor. I lay myself at its feet. I swear everlasting devotion. I promise my all, and like all daft suitors I know no regret."

In his quiet and totally different way Mr. Hopkins is a far more genuine realist than Mr. Belasco. He knows the dangers invited by being too literal on the stage. He is aware that "a very accurate reproduction" of an actuality awakens an audience to a "conscious checking up" between the actuality and its theatrical reproduction, and ultimately defeats "the very thing to which it aspires," because it is "only remarkable because it is not real." Mr. Hopkins' allegiance to

truth is not confined to superficials, nor is his hatred of distracting detail unminced. "Detail," he writes, "has been the boon of the American theatre for twenty years, detestable, irritating detail, designed for people with no imagination." As an artist Mr. Hopkins is both selective and imaginative, favoring a larger truth than the microscope can hold, championing those imaginative generalities which have been the truth of the theatre at each of its major flowerings. He faces facts but he sees his visions too. And it is from his visions as well as from his facts that some of the most glamorous moments of the contemporary American theatre have resulted.

5

The Men on the Aisle

WHEN Dickens said of Mr. Pecksniff that some people likened him unto a signpost because he was always pointing the way and never going there himself, he touched upon a popular conception of dramatic criticism which, while it may have won the critic a certain warrantable envy, has never granted him an unreserved esteem. To the majority of people, and even to that highly specialized majority of theatre people, the dramatic critic seems, at best, a spiritless person who prefers the indolence of opinions to the trials of action. Because his interest leads him only into judgment and away from performance, the world can never quite forgive him or take him with that final seriousness he undoubtedly desires. It presumes, believing it to be a charitable presumption, that he must have turned dramatic critic because he is either waiting to do some real work in the theatre or because he has failed there. As a matter of course it infers his job to be a stop-gap of a nature somewhere between a nursery and an asylum for would-be playwrights. But of one thing it is certain, and that is its unwillingness to admit that the nightly drudgery of sitting before another person's work constitutes an independent and self-respecting profession.

The inertia that persuades an able-bodied and supposedly able-minded man to take up the prideless task of sitting, sitting, sitting, and then rushing into print instead of action, is not the only reason why the merest mention of a dramatic critic can often be an enjoyable excuse for headshaking and laughter. The other and far more basic cause is the simple fact that one man assumes the right to pass judgment on his peers, to say nothing of his betters. In itself that offers an impertinence which mankind does not gracefully overlook, and which never fails to irritate the reading public of the critic when it finds itself at variance with his judgment.

By donning the official robes of justice and setting himself up as a self-anointed authority, he lays himself open to an implication of superiority which Americans, in particular, are quicker to resent than they are to forgive. More than that, as a judge without a courtroom, and with no officers to give the weight of actual correction to his verdicts, he does not confine himself to the recognized limits of jurisprudence. The ordinary judge, even when he does not depend upon the jury for his opinions, leaves the praise of good conduct to the pastors, and limits himself to seeing that the long arm of the law reaches out and enfolds only those who have been brought before him for their misdeeds.

Not so the dramatic critic. With one grandiloquent gesture of omniscience he combines the two functions, and digs into the grab-bag of his Thesaurus for both awards and penalties. Calling no court to order, and turning to no jury, he delivers himself of a sentence. Though it is couched in all the familiar terms of legal infallibility, though it barks aggressively or may even suggest constructively, it carries with it no promise of action, because its only authority is its print. It is not unnatural, therefore, that the dramatic

critic, who dares to speak *ex cathedra,* should invite the derision of all who are expected to submit to his judgment. They know, as he does, that the foundations of his authority are highly contestable. He has attended no special school, won no particular diploma, and passed none of those examinations which are the legal gates to other professions. Nor has he been put in office because of any popular referendum. He does not even hold his sceptre by virtue of anything he has done in the theatre. Usually the less he has himself done the more he is entitled to his badge of office.

He is a figure, and often a power, in the larger cities, but his readers share with him the knowledge that the roots of his sway go no further than an opinion he happens to have formed in a crowded theatre, where everyone else may have been forming radically different opinions. When, therefore, he speaks — as he is sometimes tempted to — too confidently, too arbitrarily, as though he were the one and only chosen representative of the earthly estates of Thalia, his position is somewhat precarious and not a little ludicrous. No one is forced to share his opinions, and no one concerned, either in the audience or on the stage, may be in the slightest degree affected by them. He clears his throat, and presumably his mind, and speaks. And, in his natural moments of despair it must often seem to him that the only minions of enforcement who carry out his word are, on the first day, an army of newsboys, and, on the second, touchingly indifferent but completely efficient delegates from the Department of Street Cleaning.

There is, of course, an ample sufficiency of other reasons which might well cause the dramatic critic to wonder why he should bother to have an opinion at all, and why his particular opinion should be singled out to be caught in the amber of print. He realizes (and if he forgets it all

of those whom he abuses or who disagree with him are quick to remind him) that the play he is discussing has not been written for his special knowledge. He does not have to be convinced that it is not for him or for his tribe that the theatre exists, any more than that it is not by him or his tribe that it lives. He may sputter and spurt to the limit of his inkstand, but he is a powerless nonentity when the playwright, or the actor and the director, succeeds in reaching beyond the critic's prejudices and touching what is common to the heart of mankind.

The critic cannot help but be aware of this, and is deservedly absurd if he is not glad to admit it. It is one of the bitter realities — and the glories — of his trade that he is only pitting one man's very human reactions against those of many. To a challenger (and the theatre is healthy only when the lists are full) he can only say what he has already said, parade his reasons perhaps more fully, and conclude, with a knowledge of what it is worth, "I think" against "You think." And, in this democratic age, when opinions are supposed to be within everybody's rights just as they are supposed to be within everybody's reach, the dramatic critic cannot help but ponder on what he is trying to do, and why he should be asked to do it at all.

He, more than any other kind of critic, must, because of the very nature of his subject, confront challengers at every turn. Certainly more people feel entitled to speak with finality on the theatre than on any other art. The franchise is not more universally enjoyed than is the right to damn or praise a play or a performance. The unpaid critics of the theatre may be stenographers or the most fashionable of hostesses or the most callous of Babbitts, but on the question of the merits or demerits of a play they share an identical readiness to air their views. In summing up their reac-

tions, their mind's total may be, "Gee, but it's rotten," or "God, what a swell show," or "Wasn't it just too beautiful," murmured with eyebrows arched. But in each case the verdict is equally unhesitant, and equally satisfactory in betraying the speaker's attitude and reactions.

In the case of the other arts far fewer people feel equipped to give so cursory a criticism, because the technical difficulties in medium and execution presuppose a technical knowledge on the part of critics which most people are willing to admit is beyond them. But the very men and women who are embarrassed, if not mute, before a painting, who hiss for silence in a concert hall, and never even bother to notice the architectural or engineering feats of which they take advantage every day, require no persuasion to follow in the footsteps of Aristotle. Their readiness is the final indication of the theatre as the most democratic of the arts, and one which makes its most irresistible appeal to the greatest number of people on the grounds of the spectator's identification of himself with what is happening on the stage. Also, the very medium of the theatre is too impure, too mixed and human to set up any academic barriers. It employs human actors to play in human situations that might have engulfed anyone. It necessitates no knowledge of brushstroke, or modeling, or counterpoint and fugue to share its mysteries.

Apparently the theatre is a simple and direct touchstone to the sympathies and emotions of its audiences. As a mirror in which they can face their own problems, see their own aspirations, and recognize the virtues and shortcomings of their neighbors, it invites them to judge by that standard of judgment of which no one is willing to admit ignorance, namely, their knowledge of life. The average person may not know his Aristotle. He may not know the

difference between Inigo, Henry Arthur and Robert Edmond Jones. He may be completely uninformed as to Hroswitha or a cyclorama, but he feels instinctively that his experience of life is the only special knowledge that he needs to draw upon in judging the theatre.

Hence it is that the scrubwoman, who may be untouched by the Mona Lisa or a Beethoven symphony, because she recognizes nothing in them that is common to herself, may still be moved by Juliet. In the lyric enchantment of the balcony scene, in which all tremulous young love is caught for a moment on a moonlit night, the scrubwoman sighs with Juliet because Juliet is what she wishes her own youth might have been. Her Romeo may have been a plumber, but beneath his inexpressive courtship there was an emotion which her partial eyes gratefully recognize in Romeo. By her memory of her plumber, that night they went on a picnic, she judges those young lovers of Verona, on that night when one of them scaled the walls of his enemy's garden. If the scrubwoman has had no plumber, she still has seen enough, heard enough, and dreamed enough to know what lies beneath their lyricism, and judge their actions by the standards her hearsay, her intuition and her hopes have given her. Add to the thin voice of the scrubwoman, the many voices of those who have a far wider and more glamorous experience than hers, who can establish a thousand other claims for judgment, and whose instinct and knowledge direct them down the path to many more situations in which they can recognize themselves or identify their acquaintances, and you have a babble of voices that whips the critic into a more final examination as to what and why he is.

In daring to lift his voice above the crowd the critic may feel justified because of his delusion that what he writes so

unhesitatingly is an expert opinion, whereas what they feel is only an immediate and unthinking emotional reaction. He may hope against hope that this will endow his words with their due finality. But if he has recourse to his dictionary, he only adds to his confusion. Though he may be comforted by reading that a reaction is a "responsive or reciprocal action," or the "response of an organ, etc., to external stimulus," he is disheartened to learn that an opinion is only a "judgment *based on grounds short of proof,*" "a *provisional* conviction," or at best a "formal statement by an expert when consulted of what *he holds to be* the facts or the right course." In other words the dramatic critic is always far short of infallibility, and the sooner he learns it the better it will be for him and his profession. His truth at best is his truth to himself and his own temperament but even in his statement of this one truth that can be absolutely his, he is often fallible. His fallibility, however, leaves him once more as only a single voice raised against many.

It is that very fact upon which the unprofessional critics, who constitute the general public, base the oldest of the reproaches brought against the professional critic. He is too like themselves to be important. He is not set aside by the divine gift of the creative faculty. And because he is not a creator he cannot, therefore, speak with authority upon his special subject. This method of attack, which is perennial and often effectively used to destroy the illusion of importance with which the critic is fond of veiling his judgment, goes even further. It contends with a certain logic, that, for example, only the man who paints and who knows paints can write of painting, just as the only man who can write poetry is qualified to criticize it in its own terms.

Untrustworthy and specious as this identification of the creative and critical faculties has been proven to be, the argu-

ment contains an element of truth which is too frequently forgotten, and which has a special bearing on the multiple arts that confront the dramatic critic. Though it seeks for criticism among the thin ranks of the creative, who have something so much more important to do, it does at least imply a rather wistful quest for authority on the part of the public. It means that they want the critic to do more than translate a canvas into the entirely different world of phrases. They want him to know the tools of the artist's trade, and speak with that knowledge which they feel is the ready property of a true practitioner. In short, it means that they hope he will understand the artist's problem from the artist's point of view even when he is appraising it from the viewpoint of his public.

In dramatic criticism, more than in any other form of appraisal, it is apparent that one man cannot speak with a complete knowledge of the many aspects of a production which combine to make it effective. He is faced with the sorry dilemma of speaking not only intelligently, but also authoritatively as a playwright, an actor, a scenic artist, a director, an electrician, a costume mistress, and a member of the audience. More than that, in the course of a single week of professional theatregoing he may meet, not one kind of playwriting, or one kind of scenery, or one kind of direction, or acting, or one historical period and specialized locale, but as many as six, with their corresponding styles in costume, language and demeanor. Obviously his lot is not a happy one if he attempts to muster facts towards authority. Accordingly what he does is to seek means of escape. And in means of escape his profession abounds.

For one thing he takes refuge in the highly debatable purposes of his job. He catechizes himself, with such questions as the following, and finds asylum in the easiest

answers. Is he writing to tell his public what happened and who was there? Is he only an audible member of the audience whose reactions are valuable mainly as they serve as a common denominator to what the town may think? Is he trying to help the actor and the playwright by constructive suggestions, or is he merely to describe them for prospective ticket-buyers? Is he a middleman or an autocrat, a press agent or a synopsis manufacturer? Do his readers want to know what he thinks or learn about what they may like? Is he to parade his understanding or his adjectives, his knowledge or his enthusiasms? Is he to treat each production as an isolated unit, or judge it by comparative values? Is he paid to analyze technicalities or to amuse his public? Is he to turn crusader and fight for a play or a production or a group in which he believes, even when they are not ripened enough to warrant his praise, or is he to pass judgment only on the finished product? Is he to measure what he is asked to see by a general theory of the theatre, or come receptive, with his mind and body fresh for new impressions? In short, and this is more important than it may seem, is he to be a reporter, a reviewer, or a critic?

If he is content to be a reporter, and nothing more, his job is a comparatively easy one. He is burdened with no standards and bothered by no misgivings, and the merit of his work depends entirely upon his aptitude for his own profession. He approaches the theatre as any of his fellow journalists might track down an assignment. Working for a newspaper, his is the ideal of his office, "Accuracy, Speed and Interest." His special gift is that his mind quickly orders what he has seen, just as his real value is that he tries, as far as it is humanly possible, not to thrust himself between the event and the reader. Accordingly his copy flows easily, because it is written without doubts, just as it reads easily,

because it raises no questions. It is candidly a voice of the people, speaking for the people, and making no other personal claim to attention than that which it deserves by the facility of its narration.

As reporting, its function is news, not judgment, though as in all good reporting an opinion is tactfully expressed. In this case, however, it is not so much a private opinion as an acute, if unconscious, guess at a general reaction. Its aim is to strike a norm, to represent the majority of its readers, to parallel their minds and their morals, and to reach them by information rather than instruction. Treated frankly as an account of only ephemeral interest, it takes its place beside the other news of the day, to be skimmed for its momentary worth and then discarded.

The reviewer, on the other hand, takes himself and his position more seriously, just as he hopes his readers do. Though he is primarily concerned with journalism, his position on a newspaper is a compromise between the news and editorial departments. He is a reporter with opinions, which are backed up by intuition, learning, or diligent servitude. But the very fact that he is allowed to sign his name shows that he is speaking for himself as well as his paper. He emerges, therefore, as an individual, and, according to his temperament and equipment, as a personality. He is a special correspondent of letters, who even before he is a critic, is a journalist. The past is not his province, nor the future his concern, but the present is his obligatory passion. In the theatre his business is, first and foremost, the particular play he has seen on a particular night. It is his duty to report it, even as the reporter must, but it is his privilege to write of it in the terms of his own undisguised reactions.

Most often, and quite rightly, his market is the daily press, and the rules of the press are, to a great extent, his

rules. His editors want him to tell what he has seen and thought in a straightforward and popular way. But they impose upon him the difficulties which are inherent in his job. He has no time to reconsider. His first report must come quickly and he must wait for his Sunday page for deliberation. In his daily work he must do his thinking as rapidly as he does his writing. Often the first pages of his copy are on the press before the last sheets have been finished. Accordingly he must have words and phrases on his keyboard to clothe his impressions that are still warm. The marvel is that his work is as fluent and coherent and satisfactory both as reading and reaction as it almost always is. Its very warmth endows it with the authenticity of a first-hand report and the speed of its composition tends to bring it nearer to the average playgoer's reactions.

Because of the size of his audience, the reviewer's responsibility is immense. He can as everyone knows, including himself, come near to breaking or making a play. Hence it is that, though he may speak personally, he must still bear his readers in mind, for his likes may not necessarily be theirs. He is their guide and they respect him, as a rule, only in so far as his opinion coincides with theirs. As a result they ask him to point out to them what they may think even while he is stating what he thinks. Not unnaturally he prides himself upon not being a professional lily-clasper and glories in the fact that his feet are, as a rule, planted firmly on the asphalt of Broadway. He is content with the event of the moment because it is "copy," and as such he treats it in detail.

His usual method is to begin with a sentence that expresses his own feelings in the color of its adjectives, even while it states the facts in its who, when, where and what. This is followed with a detailed plot summary, for the bene-

fit of his readers who may not be able to see the play but who still want to talk about it, or who want to know whether or not it is the kind of play to which they can safely take their husbands and children. Then comes a paragraph on the acting, and, perhaps, a slight sentence on the direction and setting, and, if the reviewer has something of Pepys in him, a final bit of news which says who was there, and what someone behind him said during the intermission. As a rule the reviewer avoids "I" and gets around it by such apologetic phrases as "to this reporter," or — in a more jocose mood — "your old correspondent," by which he frankly admits his own relationship to his readers and his journal, as well as his function in the theatre.

The dramatic critic differs from the reporter and the reviewer in that he is more interested in the idea behind the event than in the event itself. Sharing with them an indebtedness to another man's work, or rather in his case the work of other men, he is, like them, a lean-to in literature and cannot stand alone. He needs an incentive, if not an excuse, for his work, but he does not find it in the date which heads the page of a daily newspaper. Supposedly the reflections he has to make are not confined only to a passing interest because they are based upon eternal principles. His realm is the idea rather than the fact. He sees a play or a performance not in relation to what it may say to a prospective ticket-buyer, but in terms of what it does contribute to the theatre and to life. Even if he makes no mention of the past, its contribution and its sequence are somehow in his mind. To him the past is not dead because it is past any more than the present is alive merely because it is the present. There again he shows that his interests are timeless and transcends a mere date because to him, as Arthur Symons phrased it, "No perfect thing" of any time or period,

"is too small for eternal recollection," just as "any living insignificance is already dead." To him only the first rate is important. It is that which is his ceaseless goal, and his constant standard of comparison.

Unlike the reviewer, whose copy is due the next morning and sure to be of a certain presentable length in print regardless of the merits of its subject matter, the critic has a greater latitude in rejecting what is patently beneath his notice. Even when he contemplates mediocrity, which is his tireless foe, he is attracted to it only by its relation to distinction. Because he is an essayist, not a journalist, because he writes — when and if he writes at all — for weeklies and for monthlies instead of dailies, and has the time for mulling instead of reporting, his measuring rod can be the best instead of the popular. To him news is no end in itself. It is only a demonstration of principles, a moment that is never self-sustaining nor isolated but that has come from somewhere and leads somewhere.

The ritual of the opening sentence colored with preferential adjectives and followed by the plot synopsis and an adjectivial dismissal of the performance, does not satisfy him. In his own way he may cover the same material, but always with a different end in view, because he prefers deductions to appearances and reflections to statements. He is fired by his own curiosity rather than by the desire to satisfy someone else's curiosity. He seeks what is peculiar to and yet universal in the man rather than what is worth reporting in his single play; or in the actor what is peculiar to his style of acting, even while it is universal in it, rather than stringing together a succession of adjectives to describe his current performance. He watches for growth, and traces retrogressions. And in doing this he is not afraid that all knowledge is pedantry, because he writes to appease himself rather than

to consider his reader. Accordingly his method is constantly comparative, because to judge one performance, or one play, he feels he must see it in terms of an accumulation of effort, and against the background of its time. He takes all knowledge as his goal, and refuses to limit himself to the provincial confines of any single theatrical rialto. He tracks down forces relentlessly, unsparingly because his preoccupation is with tendencies rather than single instances.

Like the reviewer, the critic is, presumably, a human being, subject to all those physical causes which add to or detract from enjoyment and receptivity. His verdict, however, is not nearly so dependent, as his readers may be inclined to think, upon such prejudicial comforts and inconveniences as a good or bad dinner, an agreeable or uncongenial companion, a headache or a feeling of bodily exuberance. The mysterious register which is largely responsible for his final judgment is what he identifies, for lack of a better name, as his "sense of theatre." He can no more explain what he means by that than the reviewer could, or, for that matter, the playwright, the actor, the designer, or the producer. It is as individual to him as it is to each of them — baffling, intangible, inexplicable, but real. Call it instinct, intuition, a sixth sense or what you will, but he, like these others, is guided by some voice deep within him which only half articulates his dream of what the theatre at its best should be. Partly conscience, partly impulse, partly editor's blue pencil, partly nebulous memories of glowing moments already experienced in the theatre, partly a romantic notion of plumes and capes, long flights of steps and pursuing trains, partly a knowledge of the possibilities of each element contributing to a production, partly the electricity of imaginative discontent, partly a yearning for a moment drained of its last emotion, and an insatiable craving for

Olympus, this inner voice of the critic, which is the basis of his "sense of theatre," guides him unconsciously in his separation of what he is anxious to accept from what he cannot but reject.

Within himself this voice is an echo of perfection, which holds the deed up to the ideal it has invoked. It has much to say to the critic, but the authority of its tone depends largely upon how much he has trained it to a knowledge of the stuff of which perfection, in all its various manifestations, is made, and how skilfully he conjures up its image without being able to create it himself. For him this voice is an important guide to judgment. It speaks to him of style and all that that implies, of fidelity to a certain chosen medium or form, and points out what the style, or form, or medium should be when once the actual creator has selected it. Even while the critic sees what is happening on the stage, something within himself is measuring what he sees by what it might have been or should be. His vision is continually bifocal, because both the subject as written and acted, and the potentialities which it indicates, come simultaneously within its range.

His voice cannot speak in the gruff tones of dogmatism because it has no pitch at all until the playwright or the performers give him a new one each night. It must wait for them, regard the performance as its prompt-book, and take its cue from what the first few lines or scenes indicate as to the performers' choice of material, manner and style. But when once the performers have established their intention, then the inner voice of the critic must unceasingly inform him of the nature of their chosen goals which the performers have pointed out themselves. These goals may be as manifold as are the number of actors and plays and theatres in the world. They may be a thousand times more inconstant

than the moon, and vary entirely from play to play, and production to production. But when once the goal has been selected it takes on a quality of inevitability, and it is for this that the critic must watch and by this, to a certain extent, that he must judge.

A play or a production is, in a way, like a horse taking a jump. There are countless manners in which a horse may approach a fence, and any two horses approaching the same fence do so not only in a manner that is peculiar to each of them but different every time they come to the barrier. When once a horse has left the ground, however, when it has taken its last preparatory step, when the jump itself has begun and the animal's body is arching upwards in the air, there is only one inevitable way in which that particular jump can be concluded. It is the duty of the critic to be completely alert during the preparatory moments of a play, those initial seconds in which it is preparing for its take-off. But when it has once got under way, establishing its own style as it does so, indicating its chosen course, and leaving the firm ground of rehearsals and rewriting behind it, there is only one inevitable manner that belongs to perfection in which it can continue to its close. And it is the arc of that inevitable effort which the inner register of the critic must follow even while he is following the mishaps that may have overtaken the play, just as it is the deviation from that course which will unconsciously arouse his inner voice to protest.

When the critic is a figure of any real importance he has a definite conviction of his own, a theory of the theatre, which is the springboard to many of his enthusiasms and detestations. In his littlest examples he may be merely a critic, seeing what he sees only in terms of what he has viewed in the theatre or read at home rather than what he has lived. He may exclude life from his province, and yet

perform a valuable service as a technician, a rule-giver, a "professional dramatic critic" and nothing more. But the more he is a lean-to in life as well as in letters the more circumscribed is his value, because side by side with his "sense of the theatre" he must draw upon his knowledge of life to understand and appraise the thing he is asked to judge. How much more he is than a dramatic critic depends entirely upon how much more there is in him, and how thirsty his sympathies and emotions as well as his intellect have been. Like the scrubwoman he draws upon his fund of personal experience as a guide to what is probable, and a means of recognizing the truth and rejecting the specious. And his verdict on this score is more important than hers only in proportion to how much greater, deeper, more passionate and sensitive is his range of experience and his comment on human nature.

Obviously the separation of the functions of the reporter, the reviewer and the critic is not as final in current practise as any arbitrary catalogue of their various differences may indicate. There are, of course, many moments when the critic and the reviewer invade the territory of the reporter, or when the critic does not leave the province of the reviewer or the reviewer annexes the realm of the critic. Obviously, too, the critic such as here described exists but rarely, if, indeed, he exists at all. But in principle their functions are as everlastingly separated as are the ideas and special equipment which color their work and determine its character.

Too frequently, however, the general public and even the "profession" itself does not distinguish between them. And it is the theatre which suffers more than the language by this confusion of terms — the theatre because of the inevitable cheapening in standards this confusion entails. Just as

every Southern gentleman was once supposed to have been born with a colonelcy attached to his rattle, so, in the loose phrase of the moment, any journalist, regardless of his equipment, who is paid to go to see a performance and report it for a publication is immediately and without question dubbed a dramatic critic. He is allotted space and authority. And if he continues to write long enough over his own signature on the same page of the same metropolitan daily he will, by sheer force of habit, sooner or later develop a personal following.

Apparently the last thing that is expected of him is an academic knowledge of the theatre's background, or any active familiarity with the technical means of the current theatre. He may have been a police reporter, an editorial writer, a sports writer, or an obituary editor, but overnight he is expected to turn into a dramatic critic. If he succeeds in being a journalist when he is functioning as a dramatic critic, he will succeed in being a satisfactory dramatic critic from the standpoint of his readers and his editors. He may, and often does, do extraordinarily well both for himself and his editors by establishing himself as a wit, a wag or what you will. His perspicacity, his amusing exhibitionism, his infectious enthusiasms and delightful malice may command for him a public of such dimensions that his commercial value to his journal is high. There may be no limit to his fairness in "covering" a play, and no end to the popularity of his advice to ticket-buyers.

But before he is a dramatic critic, and not a reporter or a reviewer, he must have standards that are born of the theatre itself and not of the press-room. He must serve it, and dedicate himself to its interests rather than to his own or those of his editors or his readers. He must be the first to realize that the traditions of hard-boiled journalism which

the reviewer and the reporter have held up to the stage as its final standards, have less than nothing to do with the theatre and can only harness and imprison the imagination that is its life-blood. He must know the theatre's traditions and see behind its mysteries as well as record his personal impressions. He must not limit his concern to the commerce and gossip of the rialto, or to proving that he is shrewder than the managers in guessing at successes or failures. Sitting before an art, he cannot look upon it merely as a trade, nor can he hold it as lightly as his editors are willing to confess they do by leaving it so often to the mercy of cub reporters. When all is said and done the fact remains that he is not an agent for the manager but a servant of the art which the manager exploits.

Something of a seismograph, something of an echo, something of a teacher, a truant officer, a prophet, a guide, a coxswain, a preacher, a courier, and, particularly, of a lover, he must welcome the realization that he alone is responsible for the range to his authority, and that, no matter how far he may extend it, his opinions will always fall far short of infallibility. The knowledge of his own fallibility, however, must not discourage him. To him his very limitations must offer the inviting mirage of possible conquest, and parch his curiosity the more. His curiosity must indeed be as endless as the subject he guards and as all-embracing as the ramifications it includes. Only by its promptings can he add to his fund of knowledge, mellow his sensitivity, and sharpen his intuition. By it alone can he learn to hear all the languages which the theatre speaks. He, more than all the artists for whom he writes, must devote himself to self-training, for, while the artists have only themselves to perfect, the perfection of them all is his one ambition that touches the fringe of greatness.

In the course of his single life he can never hope to know all he needs to know and ought in fairness know before he can set himself up a judge. But it is the search for that knowledge which is his life work and a life work of such a scale that it leaves him no time to dream of being a novelist, a playwright or a producer. If he takes the time to putter on the side, or looks upon criticism as a convenient and easy meal-ticket, a means instead of an end of ineffable complexity, he is only robbing the theatre and himself, and holding his profession as cheaply as he so often gives others reason to hold it. Regardless of what outsiders may think of the sacrifices in time and energy he is forced to make for what may seem to them at best a second-hand job, he must content himself with the knowledge that it may be well for the theatre that he should do so.

Though the critic, like the reviewer or the reporter, is only a signpost when he writes of what other men have done and are doing, it is his special duty to point the way not to one playhouse or one play but to the theatre itself. Unlike the signpost, however, if he is worthy of the title of dramatic critic, he is unwilling to point the way without going there himself. In his negative, passive way he must be something of an artist himself. Denied the divinity of creation, he must at least be blessed with the gifts of re-creation. In his mind's eye rather than in deed he must constantly travel to the goal at which he aims. In fact, it is only by projecting himself in that direction that he can pretend to a knowledge of the distance which was to have been covered, or to describe the citadel which was the artist's dream. And, though he has been pressed against the wall by the journalistic tradition which has swamped our theatre as well as our literature, the dramatic critic is still needed by the theatre's public, both as a standard bearer and a signpost. Perhaps we

have never needed him more than we do today. But in any event it is worth while to keep his proper title for him until he does appear, and to snatch it away from those of us who now usurp his seats on the aisle.

Alexander Woollcott

SOME years ago Alexander Woollcott composed his own epitaph. And it was indeed a candid summary of the man, as honest as it was revealing, because, if his gravestone is carved with the legend of his own devising it will read, "Whenever wishing to say that *Ethan Frome* was the best short story ever written by an American, or that *The Greek Commonwealth* was the best historical work ever written anywhere, he never sneaked in a 'probably' or a 'perhaps' under the delusion that in some way it would give him a judicious air or a suggestion of profundity."

Nothing truer could be said of Mr. Woollcott than he has himself set down in this perhapsless tombstone. And the reason is a simple one. The Alexander Woollcott who has reviewed plays for the *Times,* the *Herald* and the *World,* who is at present conducting a less happy column in the *New Yorker,* and from whose pen have come such books as *Enchanted Aisles, Shouts and Murmurs, Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play* and *Mrs. Fiske, Her Views on Actors, Acting and the Problems of Production,* is a perhapsless man. Self-questioning is no more among his worries than profundity is among his virtues, though the virtues and the values he possesses are many.

He is no sober critic searching for the everlasting "ayes" and "nays" of his profession. Nor is he waylaid into any dull pedantry by a passion for abstractions. Ideas apparently do not interest him as ideas any more than history interests him

as history, or tendencies command his time as tendencies. His castles are not built on theories or principles. Instead he is hot on the scent of personalities and people; gossip, tidbits he can relish and make us relish, news fictionalized into importance and narrated with a skill which is as uncommon as its zest. His field is "anecdotal history"; his measuring-rod himself, his own emotions, his own susceptibility; his value is his nose for news and his fluent excitability which somehow manages to be witty even in its most perhapsless moments of surrender. The person he writes into his copy is no Bunthorne, from whose lips the word "art" falls possessively, freighted with a hazy, sacrosanct, godsent meaning. On this score — and it is decidedly in his favor — he strikes no pose. Instead he is himself. Nothing more and nothing less.

But being Alexander Woollcott is something — something very alive, something very delightful, something very elfin, something very malicious, and something that almost never fails to be very readable. Being Alexander Woollcott does not involve stealing any wreaths from the graves of Aristotle, Horace, Scaliger, Boileau, Dryden, Lessing, Voltaire, Schlegel, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Sarcey, or Brunetière. Their tombs are left inviolate by his coming. But it does mean being the most sprightly dramatic reporter of the contemporary American press. It also means being one of the most important — and amusing — of the theatre gossips since Samuel Pepys took the trouble to note, among a thousand other invaluable jottings on the naughty playhouses of the Restoration, that Lady Castlemaine "looked like fire" when the ever-ready Charles, who sat beside her, permitted his eyes to wander to Moll Davis, in the tier above. It implies having a mind crammed with facts — odd, trivial, side-alley facts if you will, but facts tucked away in a store-

room such as no other American now writing on the theatre possesses. It involves carrying a love to the theatre that manages to creep into almost every sentence that he writes, and to bring it to a glowing life. It means being able to give his column all the directness of small-talk, and being such a master of anecdotes that they lose none of their charm or spontaneity in print. It stands for strong hates and long loves, that, while they may have robbed his reviews of their judicial calm, turned his articles in the morning papers into one of the pleasantest breakfast foods to be found on the market.

And, because of its extremely personal note (which is the major virtue as well as the major defect of his writing) it also means that Alexander Woollcott as a reviewer is, in addition to being "the first wit of our time," one of our leading dramatists. The subject of his dramas is Alexander Woollcott. The scene is Alexander Woollcott's heart, a slightly enlarged heart so as to hold all of the Woollcotts who crowd into it and the loves and hates that they bring with them as properties. The hero and the heroine are Alexander Woollcott, to say nothing of the spears in Woollcott's army, who are always to be found on the programme, bearing such names as Alec, Alexander, or Woollcott; or parading under such aliases as "your old correspondent," "a much uplifted on-looker," or, what is more trying, though no less accurate, "an old meany." And the theatre is the Alexander Woollcott, as surely as the Ethel Barrymore is the Ethel Barrymore or the Booth the Booth, whether it is set up in the *Times,* the *Herald* or the *World,* or spread across the drama pages of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* as a syndicate feature for Sunday.

Do not be misled, however, into believing that this theatre knows no change of bill. It does. It most emphati-

cally does, because it is one of the stanchest repertory theatres in New York, and has for some time been devoted to what Mr. Woollcott has himself identified as his "repertoire of enthusiasms." His enthusiasms are not only part and parcel of the man, like his Mrs. Leslie Carter entrances down the aisles of New York playhouses, but, like them, they are common property.

For years Mr. Woollcott has shown himself to the world as Mrs. Fiske's Young Woodley, in an attachment that is as touching as it is wistful. His first book, his *Mrs. Fiske,* fairly barks with the joyous shouts of a fox terrier hearing his master's voice on the Victrola. Not only is he the great lady's Boswell, but he is exuberantly conscious of the flattery of being privileged to be her Boswell at all. In such a capacity he has recorded her table talk, described what they ate at their teas and dinners, and set down — in the midst of passing the cinnamon toast or tasting the soup — her ideas on repertory, her opinions on Ibsen (she found him a great playwright, as George Jean Nathan has pointed out), and her reactions to Shakespeare (whom she also included among the great). His fidelity to Mrs. Fiske has remained unshaken and to this day the advent of Mrs. Fiske in a new play brings from Mr. Woollcott a kind of hat-throwing that is one of the pleasantest spectacles of our time. Then, too, of course, Gilbert and Sullivan must be put upon the list, and so must the Four Marxes, Irving Berlin, Barrie's *Mary Rose,* murders that Edmund Pearson has not resurrected, Dickens, Kipling, the A.E.F. (Mr. Woollcott was an editor of *The Stars and Stripes* overseas), the Algonquin (which was once his favorite décor), the Thanatopsis Club, etc., etc., etc., etc., and etc.

Nor is Mr. Woollcott's enthusiasm as a hater any less strong than his enthusiasm as a "hailer." It is Sidney Black-

mer who heads his list of hates. And whenever a play opened in which Mr. Blackmer was to appear, Mr. Woollcott could be counted upon (with reason) to treat his readers to an inkwell of spleen; devastating, hilarious, conscienceless spleen that was only comparable in its malice to Mr. Blackmer's performance, or to Robert Benchley's far and justly famed bulletins on *Abie's Irish Rose* which for years made *Life* worth while. Naturally, however, not even Mr. Blackmer can contain all the honest detestations — hidden or trumpeted — of a man whose nightly occupation has been sitting before a play, particularly when the sitter is as tinglingly aware of life as Alexander Woollcott is. But as "an old meany," Mr. Woollcott stages as good a show at the Woollcott Theatre as he does when he is playing the more lyric rôle of "a much uplifted on-looker." For as a reviewer — regardless of his moods — he is not only a skilful dramatist; he is as shrewd and adroit a showman as Broadway boasts.

When you read him on Raquel Meller; on Zoë Akins at the first night of her own *Thou Desperate Pilot;* on Ruth Draper; or "Poor Carlotta," the tragic bride of Maximilian that Werfel put into his play on the Mexican fiasco; on the Four Marxes; or on Dickens — you discover the limits to which he can carry journalism. There are no dead words, no bloodless sentences in this Woollcott at his best. He is master of the yarn, of the narrative which he charges to the limits of its voltage. He is master, too, of the phrase; the ready, facile phrase that lifts a commonplace to memorability of a dinner-table kind. But he is happiest in his talent for bringing both his idols and his hates to a momentary life and in making others see them in the colors in which he dresses them himself. If he is not above his puns — his "Odette, where is thy sting?" his "Guedallas to doughnuts" and his "Owen Wisterias"— or his phrases at any cost, it

is because the minute seems to be more permanent to him than eternity itself. And it is as the Woollcott of the passing moment — the Woollcott who must be Woollcott before the moment is past — that he writes.

As the Pepys of the Algonquin, if not of Broadway, his books are filled with odd, unexpected, unimportant facts. You can find in them, for example, what Olga Petrova said on the first night of *The White Peacock;* how Mrs. Marx broke an ankle when buying a new dress for the opening of her boys at the Casino Theatre in New York; or watch H. L. Mencken watering his geraniums. You can hear about John McCullough's painting a sparrow yellow so that it would serve on stage as a canary; read about the first meeting of Morris and the future Mrs. Gest at Childs Restaurant in New Haven when there were thirteen at table after the opening of David Warfield in *The Grand Army Man;* or discover what it is that Tallulah Bankhead really thinks of *Aglavaine et Sélysette.* You can snatch up the details of the Theatre Guild's tapestry dinner, when Frank Crowninshield was toastmaster (it was, incidentally, after this dinner and the purchase of the tapestries for the interior of the new Guild Theatre that Mr. Woollcott warned the board of directors, "The Gobelins will get you, if you don't watch out"); or learn how Cissie Loftus used to give Harpo Marx a quarter for walking her dog around Gramercy Park when she was staying at the Hotel Seville and he was a bell-hop there. These and a thousand other such enlightenments can be gleaned from Mr. Woollcott's pages. They are tucked away and told as if the fate of nations hung on them. In fact, it almost seems to, when Mr. Woollcott is at work, for he is not only a receiving station, but also a sending station of the first magnitude.

Somewhere behind these anecdotes and keyhole facts

lurks Alexander Woollcott, the critic. When you see him before Duse — that worn, wraith-like Duse of the last tour — you have in a way a final picture of the man and the reviewer. He calls her "the greatest actress of them all." But Mr. Woollcott does not see her, to choose two very different critics, as either George Jean Nathan or Stark Young would see her. To them she is an actress, to be considered as an actress. To Mr. Woollcott, she is an actress to be sure, but as an actress, to be considered as a woman; a magnet for his emotions, not his judgment. Without regard for principles or technique, he paints the picture of this Duse as he has seen her, and gives her his heart. He does not stop there, however. He wants an even greater personal pleasure. He spies John Barrymore and Madge Kennedy at one of Duse's matinees. Mr. Woollcott has seen Duse in this play before. Now he wants to see them see her. Accordingly he gives his seats to them, and for his pains, he receives, as he himself confesses, "a premium rather richer than those demanded by the regular scalpers along Broadway. It was the sight of these two in tears at the rueful beauty and great tragic truth of this Italian woman."

Call it personal. Call it sentimental, silly, trivial or what you want. But do not blind yourself to your own interest in what Mr. Woollcott has said, or the interest that it may hold for distant historians. If he dodges first causes, avoids hair-splitting and ideas, he does create the living image of his passing pleasures. And he gives those very facts, those seemingly inconsequential sidelights for which the sober judges, faced with principles, have no time. When the historians of the future begin to look back on this present-day stage of ours, the principles will not have vastly changed. But the gossip, the people, and the small talk will be forgotten; and the sidelights dimmed. And it is to Woollcott

that they will turn, as we turn to Pepys, for those little grains of gossip which make the mighty history. They will turn to him, as we do today, in grateful relief at finding him content to be Woollcott and no more.

George Jean Nathan

THOUGH George Jean Nathan has two hands and a use for each of them, they both serve but a single purpose. Nor is one of them ever allowed to be uninformed as to the other's doings. With one — his right no doubt because it is farthest from his heart — he writes dramatic criticism, the most topical, topsy-turvy, intelligent, high-brow, low-brow, penetrating, bladder-bursting dramatic criticism that has come out of America. And with the other — the one nearest his heart of course — he directs at the theatre, at life in general and the contemporary scene as he sees it, a nose-thumbing of such unwearied endurance and Gargantuan proportions that it would long ago have sprained the wrist of Atlas, had he tried, as Mr. Nathan has succeeded in doing, to maintain the gesture for twenty years or more.

With both hands, however, he strikes an attitude, a mucker pose such as could be struck only by a man who had never outgrown the decision, made in his cradle, to be the *enfant terrible* of the American theatre for forty-eight hours out of every twenty-four. And it is that attitude — of being above illusions or emotions, and ag'in the government, ag'in everything, in fact — of which he has been the gleeful biographer in each of his many books, and in every article printed under his name.

This George Jean Nathan who lived so long on the printed page as the Pythias to H. L. Mencken's Damon, is proudly, stridently immodest about everything on earth

except that other Nathan who may be hiding behind the falseface, or who may exist in spite of the Nathan myth which is the result of such successful, though unresting, labor. This Mr. Nathan of the public prints talks about himself with the same insistency, though without the same excuse, as does that other and now gray-bearded George, who was once a dramatic critic before he took to writing plays and prefaces. Sometimes this Mr. Nathan speaks out frankly, with a modesty covered by his own and no other patent. "I am, alas," he boasts, "the kind of ignoble fellow who laughs at Rabelais, a certain pamphlet of Mark Twain's, the unexpurgated Swift, Walt Whitman's last words, General Grant's bed-time stories and *Reigen.*" Having picked a company of fitting peers, he concludes, "I am, therefore, doomed to meet Abraham Lincoln in hell." Sometimes, in self-definition, if not in self-defense, he tries his hand at an epigram which shows that, in book form, he is still pursued by the "dull devil" of the *Smart Set.* "There are two kinds of dramatic critics," he writes, using both his hands but closing both eyes, "destructive and constructive. I am destructive. There are two kinds of gun: Krupp and pop."

Often, however, Mr. Nathan prefers to explain himself by an implication which is so thinly veiled that it would send honest shudders up and down the spine of his old enemy, Anthony Comstock. "In every thoroughly charming and effective person," he says, keeping the thumb to his nose, but managing at the same time, as it can be done, to point his little finger at himself, "one finds a suggestion and a trace, however small, of the gutter. . . . In the soul of every fetching man" (the same gesture can be used here again) "there is a streak of ingratiating commonness." At other times, even when he is explaining his mountebankery, Mr. Nathan grabs the iron crown out of his readers' hands and

claps it resolutely on his own head. "When we denounce a man for mountebankery," he warns us — because at this point Mr. Nathan seems anxious to admit us to the plural pronoun —"we often overlook the fact that a touch of charlatanism is necessary to any honest, sincere, and first-rate man in the Republic, if he is to get his message, whatever it may be, across to the millions of boobs and blockheads who hem him in on all sides. There are men who are born frauds: there are others who have fraudulence thrust upon them. The former are not worth tobacco juice; the latter are often deserving of the highest and most intelligently critical praise."

The George Jean Nathan of the printed page, in spite of the gutter qualities he affects, and the commonness he assumes, that is not always "ingratiating," is worth decidedly more than "tobacco juice." He is, in truth — even if he had not told us so himself — "deserving of the highest and most intelligently critical praise." Charlatan he is, of course. But behind his mountebankery, his eagerness to don cap and bells, lie the sharpest, most all-seeing eyes and the most generally informed and alert brains, to say nothing of the most vigorously outspoken sentences that have yet been brought to the American theatre's dramatic criticism. Of all American dramatic critics, he has the highest visibility and the lowest gullibility. It is because of these finer qualities with which he is abundantly endowed that the methods and the bad manners of the mountebank acquire a special interest.

Whether you happen to have read him in the *Smart Set* or in *Punch,* in *Judge, The American Mercury,* or *The New Freeman;* or in any of those books of his which have been more annual than Christmas since 1914, those vigorous scissors-and-paste collections of his essays, such as *The Popu-*

lar Theatre, The Theatre, the Drama, and the Girls, The World in Falseface, Materia Critica or *The House of Satan,* you will find that this Mr. Nathan of the public prints employs a vocabulary which is most decidedly his own. The style of Alexander Woollcott may be — and is — personal, repertorial and thoroughly alive. But it is coldly academic beside Mr. Nathan's, forced to play the part of Thorvaldsen to his Brancusi, and Rameau to his Gershwin. Mr. Nathan has not only mastered the language of the *Handbooks of Composition,* he has invented a jargon of his own. His sentences bristle with such Nathanisms as flapdoodle, jerkwater salons, spank-spots, six-day sock-wearers, flubdub, wish-jags, guffaw-sesame, schnitzels of buncombe, hornswoggle, the barrack of balderdash, pfui opus, hick-pricker, Rialtors, dooflickus, the cowhouse of art, The Adventures of Phallus in Wonderland, yokel-yankers, boobletariat, and a thousand others of the same kind which even Isaac Goldberg, the official and it should be added extremely readable biographer of Nathan, has tired of before listing to their full extent.

When his verbal inventions fail him, this Mr. Nathan has other rabbits in his hat. Turning to Geneva, he borrows words from the tongues of every member of the League of Nations with which he glibly sprinkles his paragraphs. Or he delights in prefacing the names of the people he is ridiculing with such weighty titles as Doctor, "la," Herr, Professor, and Reverend, and thus covers his ridicule with a double insurance. On subjects which in other hands would be an excuse for much pontifical piety and blighting erudition, he loves to jerk his readers back to an earth-earthy earth by sudden anatomical references — dubbed "phallic fooleries" by Mr. Goldberg — that are as completely unexpected as they are exuberantly sophomoric.

Another of Mr. Nathan's favorite devices is his use of fact-crammed catalogues. He does not make his facts the slaves of gossip as Mr. Woollcott is inclined to do. Nor does he dodge them to blow diaphanous æsthetic bubbles as Mr. Young occasionally does. Instead he recruits them, and parades them with a belligerent interest in the idea under whose banner they are made to serve. When, for example, in *The Popular Theatre* (and Mr. Nathan hates the popular theatre), he considers the personnel of a first-night audience in New York, he puts his facts to a favorite and jocular use. "It is probably," he says in a typical passage written in 1918 which is equally true for 1930, "an eminently safe wager that, when the curtain lifts on the average Broadway *première,* there are not, at the very most, ten persons in the entire audience who know that Rüderer is not a brand of champagne, that Anatole France is not a French adaptation of Schnitzler, and that Richard Strauss is not the junior partner of Abraham Strauss' department store in Brooklyn. And, in the entire audience, there are in all probability not more than two or three, at the outside, who are able clearly to distinguish between Verdun and Verdi, or J. S. Bach of Thuringia and J. S. Bache of the Wall Street firm of J. S. Bache & Co."

He does the same thing — and with every good reason — when he turns the white heat of his contempt on such a treacly play of A. A. Milne's as *Michael and Mary*. "A. A. Milne, the Chelsea Pollyanna, the chain candy-stores of English literature and the Happiness Boys of the London drama, is with us again in an exhibit called *Michael and Mary*. Attending it is much like going to a marshmallow roast with Dr. Frank Crane's ghost, Jane Cowl, J. M. Barrie's boyhood Sunday-school superintendent, the Messrs. Page and Shaw, the man who first thought of putting cream

in the Alexander cocktail, Ada Mae Weeks and Ethelbert Nevin. It is the *Nachtasyl* of over-sweetened sentimentality, the *King Lear* of virtuous pap, the *Old Oaken Bucket* of the grease-paint E-string. It is so good, so pure, so moral, so upright, so tender, and so damned noble that it hurts."

The articles and the books of this Mr. Nathan abound with such illustrations, are in fact so over-rich in them, that they become fatiguing and dull Mr. Nathan's style so that too much of him cannot be read at one sitting. His writings abound, too, in short, pithy sentences that frequently achieve a blinding brilliancy, but that just as frequently are the smart-alec epigrams that a grade school boy might be proud of if he had just read Oscar Wilde for the first time. They range from "An artist of the violin may have a face like a dollar watch and a figure like a boardwalk rolling chair, but the difference between him and the actor is that he merely has to *play* the violin; he does not have to look like it," to such a superb description of Sir James Barrie as "the triumph of sugar over diabetes." And, in *Land of the Pilgrim's Pride,* they descend to such childishness as, "Nothing is so ruinous to an artist as love of money. Nothing is so ruinous to a business man as love of art."

But all of them — the epigrams that sparkle as well as those that come out flat on the brush, the illustrations, the mock-serious titles, the facts, and the "phallic fooleries"— are but tricks in the repertory of that Mr. Nathan, whose genius for low-comedy, farce and slap-stick, has made him seem the leading red-nosed comico of American criticism, even while he is its most rational and illusionless practitioner. They are what he himself would doubtless call "yokel-yankers for the boobletariat," the weapons he employs to fight off dullness, to escape the ordinary critical jargon which he despises, and to demonstrate his sainted

"indifference" and superior callousness. They are, too, the means by which he asserts his he-mannishness aggressively. And his maleness is as important a part of his writing as is his superior callousness. It is that which makes him contemptuous of both sentiment and sentimentality in any form. It is that, too, which makes him happiest when he stands alone and defies the pack. And it is also that, no doubt, which makes him delight in disliking such a play as *Journey's End,* and in describing it as "The Bachelors' Cotillion Club goes to War," "Some excellent Pinero actors go to war against the Hun" and "All quaint on the Western Front."

Even while he is resorting to the hokum of his own devising, however, Mr. Nathan is engaged in a furious crusade against every other kind of hokum he may encounter in the world around him, fighting it ceaselessly with a candor and an honesty that — while they may be expressed as but parts of his attitude — no other critic has exhibited.

Naturally enough, the negative talents of Mr. Nathan are at their best when they encounter sham. He not only slays dragons well, but he enjoys slaying them so much that his pleasure is contagious. He spares nothing. The playwright, the actor, the manager, the public, the critics, even his own person, are all crowded into a tumbril and sent mockingly to the guillotine. The religious play, the mystery play, the farce, the pseudo-intellectual drama, the sex play and all their kind, are spoofed by him with an unerring malice and a delicious common sense. Though the taste of his methods may exceed the limits of questionability, the taste and the learning behind his bad manners can seldom be doubted.

Long before the names of many of the now well-known continentals were familiar to Broadway, Mr. Nathan was

writing of them. In the midst of his ribald horse-play, he has for years quoted from critical forebears, the very existence of whom had not been suspected by the dramatic critics reared in the police courts. For years, too, he has raised his rapier, his broad-sword or his fool's stick, against pretensions and fought for honesty. He hates the critics who, in order to pass as learned æsthetes, pretend to prefer Olga Nethersole to Ann Pennington. "He"— Mr. Nathan it can be presumed because he is writing of "discerning critics"—"wants horse-play, belly-laughter, pretty girls, ingenious scenery, imported ladies of joy and eminent home talent, insane melodrama, lovely limbs, lively tunes, gaudy colors, loud humours, farce, flippancy, fol-de-rol."

The reason is that, as he has come to see it, "the place of the theatre in the community is infinitely less the place of the university, the studio and the art gallery than the place of the circus, the rathskeller, and the harem. . . . The theatre," as he defines it, "is simply, plainly — and in the soundest critical definition — a place where a well-educated, well-bred, well-fed man may find something to divert him pleasantly for a couple of hours." That is the theatre of George Jean Nathan, the theatre where Florenz Ziegfeld is honored with Shakespeare and George M. Cohan with Duse, the theatre of the passing show and a ready anxiety to applaud merit wherever merit may be found and regardless of its pretensions. It is the theatre of a man who is so free of the pretensions usual to his own profession that he can say, "When I write that I enjoy the comedy of Shakespeare more than the comedy of Harry Watson, Jr., I lie."

But there is more to Mr. Nathan than that. He has, in fact, more sides to him than an Elizabethan tragedy has subplots. His power for destruction, even his honesty, do not cover him. They may explain the Nathan who is a hedonist

trumpeting his hedonism, the Nathan who lives untouched by anything in a world apart, the Nathan who says, "I do not care who writes the laws of a country so long as I may listen to its songs," the Nathan who does "not care a tinker's damn whether Germany invades Belgium or Belgium, Germany," or who boasts that "on the day during the world war when the most critical battle was being fought, I sat in my still, sunlit, cozy library, composing a chapter on æsthetics for a new book on the drama."

That is the Nathan of the attitude, who is honest to that attitude. But it does not explain the Nathan who strikes the attitude. It does not explain the Nathan who took the trouble to write that chapter on æsthetics, or who in writing it stooped to the most obvious saw-dust tricks, in order to win the attention and approval of those very boobs he sincerely despises. It has nothing to say about the Nathan who aided Eugene O'Neill in getting *Beyond the Horizon* produced and who has been his champion again and again; the Nathan who has won the friendship of Gordon Craig; who has written some of the most illuminating paragraphs on criticism, acting, direction and playwriting which modern criticism has produced; the Nathan who has raised his voice shrilly against the movies; or the Nathan who so won the admiration of A. B. Walkley and other critics the world over that the covers of his books are decked out with "Nathan bibliographies," "library references," and congratulatory notices from each member of the British Empire to show that the sun never sets on George Jean Nathan.

The reason is, of course, that George Jean Nathan contains more persons within himself than his name does parts. He is a paradox of paradoxes. There is a false Nathan and a true Nathan as surely as there was a false Armistice Day and a true one, but he celebrates them both conjointly. He

says serious things, but he says them so that no one can suspect their seriousness, or, what would be even worse, accuse him of having been serious about them. He says unmentionable things out loud in a country which, since it was first visited by the Pilgrim Fathers, has preferred to have them whispered in corners. And he laughs instead of chants, as we like our critics to do. He laughs, not because he does not love, but because he believes that "beauty makes idiots sad as it makes wise men merry."

This kaleidoscopic Mr. Nathan is assuredly one of the wise men. No one can question that. But he has stubbornly refused to grow up to his wisdom. Instead he has chosen to be a naughty boy, telling people who have long since stopped believing, that there is no Santa Claus, and telling them when he has much more to say. The pity is that this Mr. Nathan seems to feel that his first allegiance is to the attitude rather than to the Nathan who strikes it. The pity is, too, that the most penetrating of our critics and the one whose intellect is both the most aloof and the most vigorous, should delight in a mucker pose, which tends to make him seem at times not only every other inch a gentleman — as someone once said of Michael Arlen — but every other inch a critic, too.

Stark Young

THERE were those who used to say, during the year Stark Young was dramatic critic of the New York *Times,* that they always felt inclined to pick the paper up in which his reviews were printed as if it were a teacup that forced their little fingers — as teacups will — to curl gracefully, languidly into space. By this they meant to register a protest against the style of his reviews, which they held too precious for the cold print of dailies, and his abstract methods of attack, which they resented in their craving for journalism. Mr. Young had a habit of making them feel uncomfortable. He did not write down to them. He used none of the reporter's tricks of easy interest, and he had a solemn way of refusing to limit his copy to news.

His writing was not the kind which could be skimmed, while that last burning cup of breakfast coffee was being bolted down, or which could be digested on an express subway between Forty-second and Fourteenth Street. Nor did he make jokes for the sheer fun of making jokes — puns and quips with which the newspaper readers could start the day. Neither was he simple in the terms of their simplicity, because he saw and sought gradations between black and white. In fact, he was often obscure and difficult, as difficult as his own sensing of his task; and he had an annoying habit of trying to think things through instead of turning out a good story, of raising questions instead of selling tickets. But worse than that he was fond of beauty, and

apparently neither ashamed of his love for it nor abashed by beauty when he encountered it.

Undoubtedly from the standpoint of journalism and reviewing as we know it in our dailies there was much in what the objectors said. But the very qualities which may have unfitted Mr. Young for the grind of a daily "stint" have made of him the most clairvoyant, and, in many ways, the most valuable of our critics. His special value lies in the uniqueness of the point of view he brings to the theatre, in his sensitivity, and what is more, that very preciosity, which, while they may be out of place in journalism, are as rare as they are needed in an all too hard-boiled world of cheap sophistication, mucker poses and mucker standards. He thinks in his own way, and having, as he would say, seen through to the point of a thing, he makes no compromise either with himself or with his public in writing what he thinks.

He does not think with a Gramercy Park mind and write, as Mr. Nathan does, in a Coney Island style. Neither does he feel it necessary to put on a red-nose or wave a fool's stick in his hand. He is not afraid of writing prose, which, at its best, shimmers with a radiance, a depth, a dignity, a "resistant flexibility" such as no other of our dramatic critics can muster. Nor does he thrust himself upon his readers, looking upon the theatre, as so many of our reviewers are tempted to do, as a kind of mirror in which the town is privileged to see the reflection of his mighty self. We do not learn from his reviews or his books whether he has a good rubber at the Biltmore's Turkish Bath or with whom he plays poker on Saturday nights. It is not his self but his judgments that he parades. His tastes, like the tastes of all critics, are his own, very decidedly his own. But in his writ-

ing he keeps his person private, even as he makes the reasons for his preferences public.

If his criticisms in *The New Republic,* and his books — *The Theatre, Theatre Practise* but most especially *Glamour* and *The Flower in Drama* — are not concerned with gossip, or self-exploitation, it is because, as Mr. Young sees his job, he has something more relevant to say, and something far more important to seek. He is interested in principles and he judges by them, though he is also susceptible to personalities. He seeks first causes, relationships, style, abstractions, fundamentals — the very things which are the most difficult to write of as well as the most perilous. But in his search for all of them, it is by perfection that he measures, and the perfection that he senses is not born of the pressroom or of Broadway. Instead, his image of perfection is the image conjured by a philosopher and an æsthete, of a mind that meditates and sees behind, of a man whose quest for the ideal is as unceasing as his vision of it.

His idols and his examples give the picture of his mind. He, too, has his favorites, but they are the elect of the earth. You find accounts in his pages not of the small fry, but of the great folk. It is Duse, Chaliapin, Bernhardt, Chaplin who are his readiest illustrations. And he is at his best when confronted with the theatre's best. He rises to appreciation as the majority of critics rise to the simpler task of depreciation. Though his appreciation is warm, ardent with an almost feminine surrender, it is never silly eulogy of a hat-throwing kind. It is appreciation that has fired the mind, even more than it has touched the heart. It is sympathetic with a double sympathy, gleaning the intention of the artist and identifying itself with it, even while it manages to maintain an equal comprehension of his goal. By its devo-

tion to principles, it is lifted above a personal reaction into a philosophic groping.

The idiom in which Mr. Young writes is as peculiar to him as the "flapdoodles" and "spank-spots" are to Mr. Nathan. But his is a vastly different vernacular. It does not speak the common language of the everyday man. It is rarefied speech — nebulous and abstract — perhaps too nebulous, too abstract, and too rarefied for over-long consumption. It is chastened, exalted — for our own moments of exaltation. Its danger is its uninterrupted elevation; its lack, the way in which it holds itself aloof from triviality, human foibles, and the earth. It grants no simple recesses for American tastes; provides no beefsteak and ice-cream, and tires because it never relaxes in its devotion to the best. Again and again it finds expression in such words as "dilate," "content," "continuous" and "style"; or such phrases as "ideal completion," "in its own terms," "seeing the point," "flow of movement," and "antiphonal radiance." Frequently — more frequently than one would wish — it resorts to "patterns" and "rhythms," two words which have become clichés in Mr. Young's writing. Occasionally, it surrenders to a Southern pitfall, succumbing to the sweet melody of words for their own sake, the mere excitement of sound.

His writing is emotionalized thought, which contrives to illumine a subject, even while warming it. It is not direct writing — ordered, outlined, subdivided, and straightforward. Nor is it factual with a reporter's or an historian's sense of facts. Neither is its aloofness the cold withdrawal of scholarship. Instead it is an uncompromising fidelity to uncommon perceptions. Its information is general, not specific. Dates it does not include nor any of the tidy housekeeping usual to more efficient but smaller-minded his-

torians. But it abounds in sensuous impressions, historic generalities that are disciplined, not by academic rote, but by an instinctive sense of style.

In his writing, even when his subject may be "Seeing the Point," Mr. Young can be confusing because he has a way of meandering through his essays like the Mississippi at its delta. He can be irritating, too, because he has a way of making things appear more difficult, more intricate and involved than other critics do. He does not rest with assumptions, but prefers to question and expand those principles which are held to be the very axioms of his job. But in the wandering current of his thought he often cuts deep into both sides of his subject. Sometimes he is indolent in his thinking, and sometimes he is even more indolent in his writing; thinking softly, writing sloppily, but always in terms of his extraordinary perceptions.

What Mr. Young has done, more than any other contemporary English-speaking critic, is to make clear the problems of acting — and restate them glowingly in the terms of another medium. Acting, of all the arts of the theatre, is the most difficult to recreate in writing. Generally, it eludes the phrase, as music escapes it. But Mr. Young manages to capture its most illusive qualities — the very qualities which give a performance its style, not only in terms of portraiture but also in terms of essentials. Read his essays on "Acting," "Illusion in Acting" and "Minor Exhibitionists" and you run the gamut of the art and theory of acting. You are carried beyond adjectives into fundamentals; you sense the distinctions between the Presentational and the Representational Schools; you learn the rudiments of an actor's control of a play; and you find that, though these essays lead to no definite conclusions, they bring the possi-

bilities of acting — and its various forms — within your reach; within your understanding, too.

Read him on the Moscow Art Theatre and you find a detailed discussion of the Russian tradition, a survey which makes you aware of the goal at which the tradition aims even as it points out the places in which it has been worn threadbare. Read his chapter on Cecile Sorel, with its perfect picturing of this woman, her feathers and her dresses and you see the third-rate technician hidden beneath them. Compare it with his luminous essay on Duse, in which Bernhardt and Duse are placed in brilliant contrast to each other, and you realize how far Mr. Young sees into acting, how sharp is his sense of style, and how rich is his mind, not only in theatrical illustrations, but also in illustrations from the other arts.

It is in his series of "Letters from Dead Actors" to living performers — that happiest and most popular of his devices — in which Mr. Young is at his best. These imaginary letters are not hurt by the formlessness which occasionally overwhelms his essays. They are more direct, simpler in their statement, more concentrated in their contrasts, and, therefore, more effective in their comparisons. His felicity in his choice of actors is marked. He has Rachel write to Pauline Lord, La Corallina to Doris Keane, and David Garrick to John Barrymore. And this trick of picking opposites who have something in common gives him the excuse to set the past against the present, to show the period differences in acting, the faults and virtues of each age as well as each person, even while he is drawing thumb-nail portraits of a very real and charming vividness.

But whether he is writing on acting, direction or costuming in general, or reviewing a particular play, the uniqueness of Mr. Young's point of view is apparent. It was

clear even when, in choosing a legend for his first book, *The Flower in Drama,* he turned to Seami. The quotation he selected was not without significance. It explained him then, even as it now explains him, defining his limitations as well as his virtues. "If one aims only at the beautiful," it reads, "the flower is sure to appear." It is perhaps because Mr. Young has himself been faithful to this aim that his writing at its best seems the flower in American dramatic criticism.

6

Theatre Buildings and Modern America

"'We must do something, it seems,' cried the Duke on perceiving one afternoon his principal piazza crowded with all his retainers, his friends, his very family, and 'nothing to sit down on'—all watching five great actors on a bare platform . . . 'we must really do something'; and he supplied seats the next day. . . . And up sprang the fourth scene on a handsome stage with a roof to it and all sorts of protection afforded to Donna Bianca della Bella. It cost the Duke all his spare time . . . and some millions of ducats . . . what of it: it must be well done, he said, or left alone. Very swagger!"

And that according to Gordon Craig's tracing of the theatre's history in *Scene* was the first chapter and the first verse of the Court Theatre's Book of Genesis. It is a hypothetical summary of what happened in Italy when a Duke strayed into a crowded piazza and, realizing for the first time the joys of that impromptu theatre known as the *Commedia dell'Arte*—in which his subjects were revelling—decided to appropriate them for himself and for his family. Observe that phrase, "nothing to sit down on,"

because it is the necessary cue to the feeling of incommoded, and hence outraged, aristocracy which dictated the architectural planning of court theatres everywhere. Notice, too, that "bare platform" of the theatre of the market place, and see how it changed to a "handsome stage with a roof to it" and a theatre that afforded "protection" (with the full implication of the word) for Donna Bianca. The phrases Mr. Craig has tossed off so lightly are more significant than they may seem. In the first verse of the first chapter, Mr. Craig has crammed psychology and architecture, sociology and logic, and done more than many dusty historians to explain and vivify the origins of the modern theatre building.

Though Mr. Craig ends the reading of the lesson here, there were many more chapters yet to come, especially before the contemporary playhouse in America was to be built in the image of Donna Bianca's protection. For in every country of Europe, near the marble Apollos and Dianas and the Temples of Love that dot the parks of all the great palaces of the great monarchs, you will find "a handsome stage" reared on the lines of Mr. Craig's "Fourth Scene." It may not have been erected to cage those talented players of the piazzas. It may have been built only as a means of interrupting the stiff dreariness of court functions with laughter, tears and forgetfulness — assuredly one of the most natural and excellent of reasons. It may have been put up to satisfy the exhibitionism of a monarch who was not satisfied with all the public display demanded by his office. Or behind the expenditure it entailed may have lurked no better reason than —"My Cousin France has one, and, therefore, so must I."

But it was built — plushed, gilded, silvered, laden with cupids, columned with theatrical marble, hung with

dazzling crystals, draped with fat rolls of red-painted plaster, emblazoned with the royal insignia, mellowed to the soft intensity of candlelight, jammed with the powdered people of the court, made gay by tinselled ballerinas and sad by feathered tragedians. From Versailles to Potsdam, from Schönbrunn to Copenhagen, and from Drottningholm to Tsarkoe Selo, the rulers built this theatre of the "fourth scene"— a small, entrancing, regal plaything, the epitome of their rococo selves, the theatre of the lucky ones, which glorified (even as moderns glorify) the spirit of those days of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries when, not the banker or the industrialist, the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, but Their Most Gracious Majesties, the King and the Queen were the centre of the universe and the overlords of patronage.

And it is, to a large extent, in that same theatre, that rococo playhouse of the past — of the age of powdered wigs and candlelight, of rigid precedence in the allotment of seats, and of courtiers who were glad to suffer so that Their Serenities might see and hear — where Americans assemble each night when the theatre lures them from their homes; that same playhouse, made bigger, of course, in order to include the nurse-maids and the clerks, the stenographers and the brokers, the white collar brigade, the petty tradesmen, and the corset kings and pork barons of a democracy. They come to that playhouse, made bigger but not better.

The raised thrones in the centre of the main floor are gone. So, too — in the more modern buildings — are the boxes that swelled out like tumors from the walls, obstructing the vision of the unfortunates, and commanding no real view of the stage even for the lucky ones, but serving their purpose well in letting them be seen instead of allowing them to see. The thrones have gone and the boxes may have

disappeared, but more than the inner shells of those old playhouses remain. They no longer seat a king. They no longer serve a court. Their interiors no longer need gilt and silver to send the light from the dripping candelabra dancing through the auditorium, almost as if it were determined to find a symbol for those very ducats which the Duke — or the King — had slipped out of his treasury to pay for his toy. Gone, too, are the parks in which the old playhouses stood. In this America where they are now forced to endure another incarnation, the Apollos have given way to Arrow Collar ads, the Dianas to Childs Restaurants, and the Temples of Love to third-rate hotels at which no luggage is required. But the playhouses remain. They are now to be found in Tin Pan Alley or on the edge of Hell's Kitchen, near the Loop, on Broad Street, on the fringe of the Vieux Carré, or in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown.

They are not quite the same, however. Something has happened to tarnish their charm, destroy their intimacy and steal away their point, something second-hand and tawdry, something silly, even sad. Today they are deprived of the living tinsel that was once a vital part of their painted tinsel. The ermine-backed coats-of-arms, surmounted by a crown, hang no longer over a royal box in the centre of the horse-shoe. They have surrendered to the march of time, to those unfettering events which have gradually snuffed out the lights that once blazed like second sunsets from the windowpanes of the nearby palaces. But the cupids are apt to be with them still, those prodigious, over-fed cupids of a Rubenesque paternity that are chained to ceilings and prosceniums and grow fat because they are never allowed to follow their profession. So, too, are the florid decorations, the writhing flowers and the gimcracks that hang so deadly on republican walls. They are all there — cheapened, de-

based, vulgarized, and seem even cheaper, more debased and vulgar in the pitiless exposure of their sham to which electric lights subject them. For in this second life they are now living, these old Court Theatres are swollen past their original proportions, distended to meet the needs of a democratic age, and robbed of the very reason that made them honest, even sensible, in their time.

Meanwhile, outside of them, the streets rumble with the din of modern traffic, and hum with the insistent rhythms of the tempo of a faster life, products of the age of the machine, part and parcel of this day of jazz, bustling, noisy, strident thoroughfares, royal roads of a new order. Taxis cough their way through traffic, tickers click in offices next door, steam whistles shriek from factories and trains, airplanes throb above the cities, riveters tap the steel frames of unfinished, naked skyscrapers like robot woodpeckers; subways, elevateds, buses and street cars disgorge their millions, depositing them at corners which speak eloquently of their own day, taking them past buildings that could have been reared in no other time, leaving them at automobile shows, industrial exhibitions and art galleries that are vibrant with modernity; but the forms of the old playhouses still survive, quaint sanctuaries from the present, senseless imitations of the past, sterile, uninventive copies that have lost the glory and the meaning of their prototypes.

They remain, even when audiences meet within them to see contemporary plays laid in hall-bedrooms, or productions staged in the latest futuristic manner. They remain to make one feel with Lewis Mumford, as he once expressed it in a "Theatre Architecture" issue of *Theatre Arts Monthly,* that "The search for new forms and vivid modes of expression has touched every part of the modern theatre in America, except the building itself. While the stage settings

have, in the hands of Jones and Geddes, become more structural and architectural, the buildings themselves have remained little more than a weak sort of stage-setting, thought out in one of the current fashions that sweep over the draughting room and leave a froth of vapid designs in their wake."

The reason for their survival is perplexing. No one seems to know just why the interior of a theatre looks the way it does, why it alone among the designs which come from the hands of modern architects should be stamped with such cloying traditions, or why it should always be looking backward either to the Court Theatres and reproducing them on a Coney Island scale, or wedding their general form to the architectural styles of all the countries of the world.

Considering this question, in the same issue of *Theatre Arts,* and calling the contemporary American playhouse "an architectural mad-house, an agglomeration of all styles and periods to nourish the fancies of an agglomeration of races," Thomas Craven hinted at an answer. He looked first, however, at the playhouse as it now exists on this side of the Atlantic — though he really painted the picture not of the latest theatre buildings but of those erected a score or more years ago. He noted its customary features — the "gold and red everywhere," the nudes on the ceiling "disporting themselves around a Byzantine dome," the "proscenium framed with a Moorish arch," and the "drop-curtain designed by some demented Fragonard." Then he asked himself the inevitable question that everyone must ask who considers the problem at all, "Has this baroque abomination any æsthetic meaning? Has this gorgeous palace of frivolity any relation to the life and aspirations of the present time?"

And he found that he must answer both these questions with what he calls "an emphatic affirmative."

"We must remember," writes Mr. Craven, "that the theatre is supported by restless, middle-class audiences whose lives are dull and unimaginative. Dismissing the small minority who love the drama as an artistically ordered presentation of human experience, we must consider the theatre as a place of refuge, an escape from life, a retreat for the sentimentalist eager to steep himself in a world of illusions. It enables the average person to project himself into romantic situations, extravagantly happy, comic, or even tragic, in which the monotony of his emotionally starved existence finds momentary compensation. It is the living embodiment of his dreams, his day-dreams of wealth, power, and aristocratic surroundings. This illusion operating on the insensitive mind produces a resplendent over-world, the fitting milieu for the enacting of a smartly-tailored 'super-life.' It is this pathetic condition — the inability of the average American to satisfy in actual life his craving for aristocratic splendor and the consequent seeking for the fulfillment of his dreams by an imaginary participation in the drama" which Mr. Craven offers as reason not only for cheap plays and motion pictures of "high society life," but also for the very over-ornamentation of the contemporary American playhouse.

There is no doubt more than a suspicion of truth in this "emphatic affirmative" of Mr. Craven. One visit to any of the "cathedrals of the screen" is almost enough to prove his point. The Roxy and the Paramount are in themselves arguments in his favor, palaces for a palace-hungry and unsophisticated democracy, where, for half a dollar, the nurse-maids and the white collars can be kings and queens in a Court Theatre built large enough to hold six thousand

other fifty cent kings and queens; palaces where all of them can sink their feet into richer carpets than their homes know and themselves into soft upholstery, while uniformed attendants bow them to their seats with a studied deference which is all the subtler for being outside the tenets of the democratic dogma. Nor are the movie palaces the only proof, though they are the most opulent and complete. The older theatres in New York alone — the Knickerbocker, the Liberty, the Casino, the Belmont, the Princess, and even more unquestionably the red and gold Empire that seemed so happy when it housed the plush and satins of Mrs. Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* — were all built on the ground plans of the "Fourth Scene" and are — with slight modifications of course — servile, if unconscious, copies of the Court Theatres, now fitted up to suit what is supposed to be a republic's taste in theatre buildings.

Look away from them, however. Turn to the newer theatres, the playhouses that are the products of more enlightenment and what do you find? Greater simplicity, the gewgaws hacked away or toned down, the cupids more or less abandoned, and the murals by "demented Fragonards" omitted. But even now, their greater beauty and their enhanced taste do not find expression or inspiration in the idiom of the present. Their architects have still bent over their *Picturesque Spain* or *Picturesque Italy* before setting to work in order to find a precedent for their styles and ornaments. To build their theatres for this "million-footed Manhattan" they still crane their necks at the Old World. They may no longer look at the Court Theatres. They may be above the tinsel that once was theirs. They may have come to abhor the baroque. But they do not look far beyond them. They borrow wholesale from the forms of national architecture which many of those Dukes and Kings, who

sponsored the original playhouses of the "Fourth Scene," could not fail to recognize as their own. Instead of borrowing, if borrow they must, from the ideas of a Kaufmann, a Littmann, a Walter Gropius, a Max Hasait, a Wijdeveld, or a Strnad — modern European architects who know their business — they prefer to negotiate a loan for any foreign style and build us playhouses in the idiom of all nations and all periods, in much the same way that Alice Foote MacDougall builds her coffee houses, though in a more enduring form.

The Maxine Elliott has a fine classic façade. The Martin Beck is a beautiful adaptation of the Byzantine. The interiors of the Chanin chain of playhouses and the newer Ethel Barrymore Theatre, which the Shuberts own, are based on familiar European orders, boasting, as a rule, contrite and subdued rococo decorations. The Golden billows with Spanish galleons and curving Spanish lines. The Theatre Guild, when it came to erect its new home, went to the Renaissance and Italy for its inspiration, both on the inside and the outside of the building. At Yale, with a good deal of reason because of the Gothic forms which our colleges are taking, and with a great deal of success, the University Theatre was modelled on Gothic lines. Even when a chaste and simple structure like the Little Theatre or the Music Box is built on a somewhat native scheme, it is to the past and not the present that our theatre architects turn. The façade and the interior of the Ziegfeld Theatre, as designed by Joseph Urban, are the only theatre decorations in New York in which the pulse of the present is felt.

It would be absurd to expect no American playhouses to be built on the lines and models suggested by Europe. In our theatre-building, as in our playwriting, we were (and, unfortunately too many of our architects still are) colonials,

carrying to the New World the modes of the Old. When the early American architects were asked to build a theatre, it was inevitable that Covent Garden and Drury Lane (enlargements of the "Fourth Scene," too) should come to their minds. They remembered their planning, their decorations, their back-stage equipment, their lights, and set to work to reproduce them so that young America might enjoy in its theatre-going the same luxury and the same sensations that the play-goers of the Mother Country enjoyed. The Eighteenth Century Court Theatres became the blueprints from which all American theatres were built. Their decorations served as patterns for them all. When, for example, the long vanished New Theatre, built in 1793, on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, carried on its entablature an "emblematic representation" of *America Encouraging the Drama,* under which was painted the motto, "The Eagle Suffers Little Birds to Sing," it was only continuing a hoary tradition of the Old Country. A republican word such as "Eagle," and a patronizing verb such as "suffers" might betray the patriotism of a zealous manager in what was then the nation's capital, but certainly the use of an allegorical painting indicated no originality on his part.

It was, perhaps, to be expected as the centuries unrolled that the borrowed forms should remain. But it is amazing that they have never been naturalized, and that the present, which is so markedly native in other respects, should have left them untouched and furnished no material from which a fresh, indigenous approach could be made. Philip N. Youtz used, in his *Sounding Stones of Architecture,* the happy illustration that always asking our architects to invent new forms of their own devising would be as unfair as it would be to expect our forefathers to have invented a new language for the continent to which they came. But the fact remains

that from an old language we have made a new one, as Mr. Mencken would insist, or one which is, at least to all intents and purposes, our own. And in architecture we have felt free to adapt old orders to our own needs in every kind of building except our playhouses.

In planning our theatres, our architects have been faced with problems of a special kind, with which the theatre architects of other countries do not have to wrestle so consistently. If, therefore, it is the interiors of American theatres which are most frequently discussed, it is because our theatres are rarely permitted to have exteriors that amount to anything. Problems of real estate and lack of space combine to make our theatre exteriors what Kenneth Macgowan once called "the shortest distance between two stores."

The Germans, the French, the Swedes, the Austrians and the Italians show their consideration for the theatre by giving their national institutions sites of prominence in their city planning; sites, incidentally, such as we usually reserve for libraries, post offices, stations, and museums but refuse to grant to the theatre. The reason for this is of course that these foreign playhouses are owned by the state and supported by a national subsidy. Our theatres, as everyone knows, are not backed by the government. They are in the hands of private individuals, manager-producers who cannot be expected, when all their risks are considered, to spend their money on a site that is susceptible to architectural treatment on all four sides, especially when they can increase their profits by running up an office building over their foyers and pushing it as close to the auditorium as the fire laws allow.

The exteriors of American playhouses seldom betray the fact that they are playhouses at all. Not speaking to the beholder in the terms of functionalism, they rarely take into account that tri-partite division of their structure which

many European theatres confess. They do not show one part of the building devoted to box-offices and foyers, another to the auditorium, and a third to the stage-house, which, because it includes the gridiron, must tower above the rest. Occasionally, as at Yale, where the Gothic bastion demanded by the stage-house fits neatly into the functional ordering, or as in the Guild Theatre, where the back-stage tower rises as a consistent, if not an integral, part of the Italian scheme, our architects consider the unity which can give point and dignity to the exterior of our playhouses.

Most of them, however, are as untrained in the inner needs of a theatre as they are unaware of the possibilities of its exterior. They are decorators, artists in *appliqué* and past periods; neither men of the theatre nor men of the present. Their knowledge of the practical working requirements of the back-stage is as naïve as their endless reliance on old stencils is uninspired. They feel that, when they have put on the last bit of plaster on the proscenium arch (which they usually make anything but a restful, concentrating frame for the drama it encloses) they have done their jobs. When it comes to such matters as the switchboard, the planning of light strips in the balcony, or the technical world of the gridiron and the back-stage, they are often helpless. They can provide the tiling for the bathroom but not the fixtures. The wonder is that, to be consistent, they do not make grooves on the stage floor for the woodwings which were an essential part of the old Court Theatre's equipment.

It must be admitted in their favor that our theatre architects are faced with a dilemma which, so far at least, has defied solution: — the problem of the electric signs and billboards with which the manager-producers are fond of obscuring or distorting even their best made plans. Lewis

Mumford, discussing this difficulty, says, "There is still another reason why scarcely a distinguished architect in America has been tempted by the theatre; and this is the fact that, however excellent an elevation may be when it leaves the architect's hands, the chances that the whole effect will be ruined by placards, billboards, elephantine marquees, and a terrific spatter of electric advertisement are at least a hundred to one; so why should the architect bother to begin with? . . . The only way that the architect could meet this problem would be by outdoing the manager and creating a façade which, in its inception, would be sheer advertisement." The problems of space, of mastering the technicalities of the back-stage, of building playhouses that, both in their interiors and exteriors, betray their functions, and of finding a way out of the dilemma presented by the billboards and the signs are problems worthy of the best mettle of our architects. But the problem of finding a form, a use of masses and lines, that springs from the present and confesses its parentage with pride is even more challenging. It is Sheldon Cheney, who, in *Theatre,* Mrs. Isaacs' collection of essays, best states the relationship that might exist between the contemporary playhouse and the modern age.

"I dare say there has been more essential architecture — creative building to satisfy æsthetic need,— during the last thirty years in our ocean liners, our flying ships and our automobiles than there has been in set buildings. In these things the problem of building has been linked with a machine-problem, and the mechanical 'feel' has determined decorative expression. . . . On an ocean liner — except where, as a concession to snobbishness, a Louis XVI Salon or a Pompeian lounge has been added — there is absolute fitness, expressive, naked beauty, in the aspect of the ship as a whole, precisely and lovingly shaped for speed and grace, her fun-

nels dominating with the feel of engines below, with the clean sea-faring finish everywhere apparent, long unornamented stretches of deck, the cleancut equipment of such working parts as the captain's bridge. These liners have become immense hotels with mechanical means for sea-going. If the designer of a theatre could think of his problem as directly and honestly as that, would we not have a building quite as expressive of stage needs and audience needs as the ship is of sea-going and passenger-comfort?"

Though one may shrink back at first from the starkness, the mechanical supremacy, the eloquent bareness, of Mr. Cheney's solution, the fact remains that, when the first shock of his idea is past and the first refusal to part with the gold and plush which have always been features of a theatre building is conquered, it becomes clear that the future lies at least near to the path he has cleared, if theatre-building is to have a future in America. The masses, the materials, the contours of the present are bound to find their way into the playhouse, when theatre architecture stirs to any creative impulses, shaking the architects from their lethargy and the public from its wistful "super-life" in a past to which it does not belong. Then the theatre buildings as buildings and as theatres will have a new beauty for the nurse-maids, and possess a new vigor of their own. Then we will no longer be forced to see Yank in *The Hairy Ape* hurl his shovel to the floor of an engine room in an ocean liner which is erected behind the picture frame of a theatre that belongs in everything but name and taste to a period that antedated the clipper-ships.

When our architects become self-reliant exponents of this vigorous present they will find modes of their own. They will discover that to build theatres it is no more necessary for them to go back to the Duke and Donna

Bianca for a model, than it is for our dramatists to pour their plays into Elizabethan moulds. And when our architects, who have been so slow in making this discovery, finally stumble upon it, our plays and our playhouses, and the age for which they both should speak, will find themselves in a new and stimulating harmony.

7

We — of the Audience

As audiences who assemble in the theatres that the architects have planned, to watch the work of these playwrights, these actors, these designers and directors, and as theatre-goers who may even bother to follow the reviews next day, we want to have that confident, exhilarating feeling which informs us that what we are sitting before each night is the best — the very best that ever was. Well, if not quite that, at any rate the top-notch; the top-notch of this season's offerings; or at least the best that this week is apt to reveal. We want it to be the very best because we have no middle register to our enthusiasms.

We spend superlatives as if they were Confederate money. We like it when our critics hail, as they do each season, some pretty young thing as "a second Duse" because she has taken a panting curtain call which is artfully planned to make us believe that because she has worked hard in her hysterics scene she must also have worked well. We do not want the word "great" kept in the ice-box too long. And we are particularly fond of having "the great American drama" in our midst each year, even though there may be, as there

occasionally are, three or four plays in town at one time that we have crowned with that perennial superlative.

We like to have both our idols and the excitement of serving on their welcoming committees. We enjoy the sensation of endowing each moment with importance because from the importance we give those moments a certain second-hand importance is bound to come rippling back to our own shores. We prefer to feel that glory and grandeur did not die with Greece and Rome, and that not only our lifetimes, but our immediate presents are somehow tinged with glory, because we like the surrender which the "best" entails.

It involves a comforting emotion — and a warming one. And it saves us from thought. It spares us wearisome, hair-splitting refinements, theory that gets nowhere, because we like to believe that when a thing is once dubbed "great," or "the best" that we of the audience are thereupon relieved of the nuisance of having to decide for ourselves about its merits. Any one of the veteran superlatives is such a reassuring word and carries with it such conviction, even such finality. When it is once bestowed — and the sooner it is bestowed the happier we are — the qualities of the thing in question seem somehow to have become unquestionable.

Its merits or its blemishes have passed beyond our control even as they have departed from our sphere of worry. It has arrived. And when it has once "arrived" and we have thus succeeded in making it unassailable — a sort of Cæsar's wife in art — we can dismiss it from our consideration, put away our scales and close our minds to the qualities which may have made it "arrive" with a thankful, "That is that." Then, according to the myth, we are ready to enjoy it. And we want to enjoy it. More than that we want our neighbors to enjoy it, because we are prepared for what Stark Young

once called "Community Swoons." We have succumbed to a group emotion, gone back as Mr. Young pointed out to the *Chanson de Roland* and selected Charlemagne and his warriors as patterns for modernity.

" 'Christ God,' said King Charlemagne in the *Chanson,* 'in evil case am I,' and tore his beard in a great wrath and wept sore; and with him wept all the horsemen of the Franks. There were twenty thousand in the ranks that fainted on the ground." That, as Mr. Young noted, "was a group emotion indeed, twenty thousand swooning at once, not to speak of the very handsome sympathy of it. And so it is in this town of New York about the theatre very often, though too mildly swooned to work very much towards artistic creation. Great patches of us are blown down together by something or other; and that settles it. The thing is great art, is immense, grand, the height of one's artistic adventures, the thrill of one's life, what else is to be said." Only now, when we faint on the ground, we do it to the tune of hundreds of thousands.

He, she or it (the actor, the actress or the play) is then a success. A success is above carping because it carries the double authority of art and the box-office. And nothing succeeds like success, because it must be good or it would never have succeeded. It is we of the audience who have made it a success; the critics have merely chosen our adjectives for us or pointed the way.

We want the vote to be unanimous. There is something so comforting, so friendly about a unanimous vote. It bespeaks such harmony and avoids even more discussions than it spares wounded feelings. When once the vote is taken, however, woe to the person who does not run with the pack, to those who may entertain their reservations, to the contrary-minded. They are lacking in graciousness. They

are cranks. They are crochety. They have not the right spirit at all. And who are they, anyway, to get up on such a high horse? For all their talking we bet they could not do half so well themselves. Woe to them because they are thinking as individuals, because they have not bowed to the will of the majority, and have only tried to spoil the fun. But woe, most emphatically woe, to the theatre that such should be the state of things.

Of the fact that it is, there can be but little question. Explain it away by citing mankind's "mysterious preference for the best." Call it a delightful enthusiasm, a charming good-will, a healthy optimism in the *genus Americanus,* or what you like. But do not dodge the truth of what it means to the theatre. These "Community Swoons" lay the axe to all "standards of excellence." They mislead the performers even more than they indicate that we have been misled. They reduce the great battles for merited recognition in an art to petty hand-to-hand skirmishes between seductive personalities or second-rate talents and a public that is ready to cry "Kamerad" before the encounters commence. Not only do they remove those brambles by which Hugo said "the avenues of art should be obstructed" for the near best, but they leave them more thickly clumped than ever before for the true best. They lead manager-producers into thinking — and quite rightly too — that we do not know the false from the genuine, the good from the bad, the best from the not-so-good.

They tempt actors to palm off any applause- or phrase-catching device that is fool-proof; dramatists to turn out stuff that will pass; directors to rely on the moustache-pullings that Mr. Hopkins abhors; and scenic artists to design settings which will "get a hand" when the curtain goes up. But mainly these swoonings and their attendant

hyperboles show that we of the audience have failed the theatre as badly, as wretchedly as the theatre has ever failed us. We have not been audiences at all, but cattle stampeded by some common alarum and rounded up in a pen. We — and the critics — may have made the "he, she or it" of the production happy for the moment because we have given them money for their bank accounts and phrases for their scrap-books. But we have given them no real reason for self-respect. We have merely thrown away the rudder which it is our lot to hold. We have palavered in a parlor but not in a friendly way. And they, if they are intelligent, cannot but be the first to realize and resent it.

When as audiences we have succumbed to a group emotion of such a kind, we have cheated ourselves of the truest pleasures the theatre can offer as an art or as a place for adult entertainment. We have robbed ourselves of the delights of individual discovery. Instead of letting the theatre speak to us as individuals, instead of allowing its truth or its beauty, its wisdom or its wit, to reach out to us and conquer us, we have come to it too supine to make a conquest worthy of its best efforts.

In the process, we have reduced appreciation from an experience to a rumor. Like true Americans we have not inhaled the fumes of our liquor but sent it racing down our throats, all at one gulp, muttering a summary though unconvincing "fine." We have brought no comparative judgment into play, awakened no memories, only released a well-oiled superlative as a résumé to what must have been a complicated process of emotion or thought, if we were at all aware of it or ready for each of its joys as it came along. In being willing to do this, not only have we denied the theatre all the shadows that give it interest and make its high lights stronger, but we have also betrayed how cheaply

we hold it. We have shown that to us it is not even an entertainment. It is merely a passage of time that is unworthy of our thought or of the courage that might make us stand apart from the herd to nourish or defend our own discoveries. Nor is it humility before an art which contents us with a final adjective or two. It is merely the indifference we feel to the thing which has conjured them.

We cannot blame the manager-producers for giving us what they do, unless we show them that as single entities, capable of independent thought, we can make our own judgments on their offerings. It is their duty to give us what we are to see but our privilege to be its ultimate judges. If we are willing to call near-beer, beer, and pink pop, champagne, we not only stultify our own palates but we discourage the beer-makers and the wine-makers from doing their best even as we encourage the near-beer makers and the pop-manufacturers to do their worst.

What are we to do if we are content, as we generally are, to squander big words on little things, when, once or twice in a lifetime, the truly big things come along? What can we call perfection, if we are ever asked to face it, when we have sunk into the habit of greeting mediocrity by perfection's rightful name? If we refuse to think for ourselves, and if our kindness leads us into wanting an unquestionable success each week, why not — for our own sake, if not out of consideration for the theatre — say so frankly and call things by their proper names? Let us flock with the town if we must, let us swell the receipts of a success so that its success is elevated beyond question. But — and it requires only the slightest thought to do so — let us of the audience leave our adjectives which pretend to criticism at the box-office with our dollars if success is all we want, or keep our heads clear as to the differences that exist between what is

good, indifferent, worst, good, better, or best. For it is we of the audience who imperil the theatre by our "Community Swoons," our nightly "wonderfuls," weekly "bests" and monthly "greats"; imperil it by debasing its standards.

That, of course, is not the only way in which we fail the theatre. But from this yearning for the indisputable best that grants the mind a leave of absence come other evils. One of these is the corollary to the swoons, and has again to do with our lack of a middle register. It is our love of wholesale invectives, born as it is of the same blindness to gradations and the identical willingness to reduce all the complexities of the theatre to the unmistakable terms of black and white. It is our readiness to avoid thinking which once again causes us to jump from "swell" or "great" (according to our pretensions) to "rotten" or "the worst." Here, too, we indicate that in our haste to reach some kind of a conclusion that sounds conclusive we have ignored the details of the whole and merely tagged the result with the first adjective or two our Thesaurus may have offered, or our neighbors may have uttered. We have forgotten that in the world between these extremes, which we refuse so often to consider, lie all the hopes for growth, the reasons for failures, the seeds of greatness, the human and artistic weakness and the virtues which give the theatre its mystery and its charm and make its very incalculability inviting.

Worse than our habit of jumping on a headlong express from the basement to the roof, is the shortness of our stay when we have reached the top. The view from the summit seems to hold none of the rewards which a more gradual climb might have made apparent. Having gone as far as we can, we do not pause to look down or to enjoy the altitude.

The fact that we wear our best adjectives on our sleeves each night not only means we have kept no Sunday best at

home, it also betrays the sorry truth that in our praises we must constantly be Indian-givers. We bestow a superlative on Monday night which by Thursday we have taken back and re-bestowed, without thinking of the infidelity involved — just as if on Monday night it were not already soiled and wrinkled, even mutilated, from ten or twenty or thirty years of hard usage.

This habit of speaking only in terms of stencils of the ultimate makes us as ungenerous in our praise as we are impatient with everything except the unassailable. For that very reason it tends to make us wary of experiment because the whole point of an experiment is not the finished or the unassailable (as though anything really possessed either quality) but the unfinished and the assailable. It is in its willingness to be incomplete that the courage of an experiment lies and that it asks for courage from its audiences. But when we want the swoons and welcome the thumbs-down, we show that the transitional, which is always imperative to the health of any art and the flux which is its one recipe for vital and continuous living, are not included in our interests.

Our preferences for the safety of harbors does not imply any permanent partisanship. We wait only for the next one to be sufficiently advertised, and then we come trooping to it, running with the pack. We are — and in our more rational moments we must admit it — as a rule as fickle as we are unthinking. The first crow's-foot, the first fattening of the arm, is enough to turn us from the pretty young thing before whom we were prostrate last year — or was it last week? — because we have invested our affections in her person rather than in her talents. We make of our playgoing an endless series of coronations, and coronations are as costly in the theatre as they are out of it. For all our talk about

caring for "better drama" and "a better theatre" and "the higher things," we do not let the theatre seep far enough into ourselves to touch our loyalties. Why should we? We would have to bother then to see beyond personalities into principles or at least to see personalities in terms of principles. We would have to make up our minds as to what really was a good play, or why each play could be good in its particular way, or in certain of its portions.

Of course we want the theatre to succeed, and the best to succeed in the theatre, and this to be the best of all possible worlds. But we of the audience have taken a strange manner of making our successes and justifying our superlatives. Our friendly, but apparently somewhat starved, social spirit has led us away from the detachment of impersonal judgment, for a new and exciting and personal element has entered into it all. We have discovered, since actors are no longer rogues and vagabonds, and since some of the "nicest girls" do go to dramatic schools and even on to the stage, that actors and actresses are really human beings. More than that, they are drawing cards if we announce them as guests of honor for our club meetings and our public dinners. Accordingly, instead of troubling to think about the theatre, we of the audience — and particularly the women — have organized ourselves to stand behind the theatre as it was never stood behind before.

We form theatre-going clubs. It makes running with the pack much simpler. And, as we have five hundred or more members, we represent a federated unit which it is not safe for the manager-producers to ignore. We may, once a month, go to their playhouses *en masse,* and they like the business that we bring them. Who can blame them — or us — when we take five hundred or more good tickets off their hands at one time? Though being herded to the theatre

like a group of orphans on a picnic may destroy our desire, even our need, for thinking for ourselves, since Madame President or her Playgoing Committee has thought it all out for us, who can be so foolish as to doubt the good we do the theatre.

Nor is this the limit of our good work. We give luncheons and dinners, play luncheons and drama dinners, and we stud the Guests of Honor table with the great of the stage. Their managers and their press-agents, and even they themselves, these actors and actresses, know that we are doing them what the Girl Scouts would describe as a good turn. This gathering we have fostered runs deeper than a mere entertainment. The presence of these actors may insure a plentiful, paying attendance at our luncheons, but our luncheons hold their own compensations for them, by giving both them and their plays publicity, and publicity we are told on all sides is the thing that the theatre thrives on and needs most. If an actor happens to refuse our invitation, because he believes that Duse and Maude Adams were right and that Charles Frohman knew his business in keeping the off-stage life of actors as quiet and private as possible, you cannot blame us if, after all that we are doing to help him, we call him off-ish, ungracious and unsocial, and lose interest in his work, at least so far as our organized interest may be concerned.

What we do not see is how unfair it is to ask an actress or an actor to sit down at a table in street clothes, in the disillusioning glare of a dining-room, and to be one of us; to be one of us in fact when all five hundred of us are forgetting the glamor that he or she may have had for us in the theatre, and are turning a thousand curious eyes on him as he drinks his soup, chews his hard rolls, and handles his asparagus. Worse than that, we fail to remember how unfair

it is to ask him to rise to his feet, while the waiters are clearing away the tables, and make one of those wretched little speeches that only actors can make. Those heaving, sighing, sentimental bits of nothingness which fall from his lips (or hers) cannot fail to come to our minds and bother us when later we happen to see him as Hamlet or her as Candida.

The fault most certainly does not lie with the actor if he makes a bad speech. After-dinner speeches are not his business, and if he seems, in the vast depths of that Moorish dining-room, like a gold-fish on the carpet, it is only because we have taken him out of his proper element. To have him move us to the limit of his capacity for moving us in the theatre, we of the audience must be strong enough and uncurious enough to know him only at his best. We must grant him his privacy so that his grip on us may remain unthreatened, for knowing him is only cheating him of his myth of other-worldliness by means of which he casts his most potent spell in the theatre.

Yet because of some perverse human weakness we do insist upon these dinners, these teas and these luncheons; draining the actors of their energies, holding the dinners at the very hour when we should be going to the theatre instead of making it come to us. We do it because it is amusing — to us. We do it no doubt with very good intentions, but what we do not see is that, if the theatre means all the things to us that we say it does at those dinners, our chiefest duty is to be facing a stage instead of a speaker's table. We must learn, even though it robs us of a certain amount of pleasure and undeniable thrill, that the business of our hands is not hand-shaking with the actor but applause for his performance, and that, for our sakes as well as theirs, actors should be seen but not met.

Learning that and leaving society to society and the theatre to the theatre we might then, *perhaps,* have time enough left in which to permit our adjectives to be the result of our own ideas instead of group emotions. We might even outgrow our naïve longing to have the best with us each night, and observe our players and our productions more closely so as to try and discover the stuff of which the best will be made when it does come. Then, as audiences, we may be said to be doing our duty, even — though I hesitate to use the word — our best, and our patronage may mean more than dollars and cents to the theatre.